THE TATTOOED COUNTESS

CARL VAN VECHTEN

Philip J. Bean

Christmas 1924.
Wade.

THE TATTOOED COUNTESS

CARL VAN VECHTEN: A BIBLIOGRAPHY

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THE BORZOI: 1920
WHEN WINTER COMES TO MAIN STREET, BY GRANT OVERTON (1922)

Mr. Van Vechten is the composer of:

FIVE OLD ENGLISH DITTIES (1904)

* *Published also in England*

The Tattooed Countess

A romantic novel with a happy ending

Carl Van Vechten

New York Alfred · A · Knopf
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FOR HUGH WALPOLE

"Nous travaillons à tout moment à donner sa forme à notre vie, mais en copiant malgré nous comme un dessin les traits de la personne que nous sommes et non de celle qu'il nous serait agréable d'être."

MARCEL PROUST.

THE TATTOOED COUNTESS

Chapter I

On Thursday, June 17, 1897, in the women's toilet-room at one end of a parlour-car on the Overland Limited, speeding westward from Chicago, a lady sat smoking a cigarette. It was a sultry day and she did not appear to be very comfortable; obviously no one but a confirmed smoker would have resorted to this only means, in the circumstances, of evading the custom of the country.

The Countess Ella Nattatorrini was a well-preserved, fashionably dressed woman of fifty. Little lines were beginning to gather around her grey eyes. Her golden-red hair, parted and waved, quite evidently owed its hue to the art of the hairdresser. Her slightly sagging chin was supported by the stiff bones in her high lace collar. She was at that dangerous and fascinating age just before decay sets in. Nevertheless, although at the moment an expression of melancholy lurked, shadowlike, about her countenance, her face offered at once the impression of an alert intelligence and an abounding vitality, an impression accentuated by her somewhat saucy nose which tilted slightly upwards, a mouth which, aided by artifice, formed a perfect Cupid's bow, and by her small, well-formed, rosy ears, her

best feature. There was something agreeable about her figure, too, despite the undeniable fact that she was a trifle stout. Had she been a milkmaid, one might have described her as buxom, and she would have been hard put to appear to advantage in the styles of 1923. The mode of 1897, however, exactly suited her. Her hips and breasts and buttocks were round and pleasing, and she set off smartly her black taffeta dress and her toque of black coquilles, piled with yellow roses, feathers, and ribbons. On the curve of her breast sparkled a life-sized, gold dragon-fly, the wings of which were encrusted with rubies and sapphires, and from the tail of which depended a diamond-studded watch. Her low shoes were of a French design and her black stockings were sheer. Her mutton-legged sleeves, which, bulging at the shoulder, fitted the arm tightly below, terminated in ruffles of ivory lace, fashioned to fall across her hands, but, owing to the excessive heat, she had turned these back, exposing a curious emblem which had been tattooed on her left arm just above the wrist: a skull, pricked in black, on which a blue butterfly perched, while a fluttering phylactery beneath bore the motto: Que sais-je?

Her cigarette—her tenth since she had left Chicago—finished, the Countess discarded the stump and opened the window to permit the smoke to escape so that no evidence should remain of her voluntary turpitude. Then she returned to her green

plush chair in the parlour-car. Beside her reposed a black leather travelling-bag and a new novel by Paul Bourget in a yellow paper cover. Propped up against the wall near the window stood a black lace parasol with a carved ivory handle. The car was not crowded and the places opposite, as it happened, remained unoccupied. With a somewhat unconventional, considering her environment, but entirely unself-conscious impulse she placed her little feet with their trim ankles on this seat. Then she made an entirely unsuccessful attempt to read a few more pages in Bourget's novel. Her effort to arouse her interest in literature proving abortive, she permitted her gaze to fall on the landscape outside, where a lambent sun lit up the rolling country, splendid with its vast fields of corn, the half-grown stalks, with their green leaves and tasselled cobs, waving in the slight breeze as far as the eye could reach, so that the train seemed to be passing through the midst of some great inland sea. Occasionally these fields were interrupted by stretches of charming wooded country, by meadows, stocked with cattle, by straggling, nondescript villages, by farmhouses and yards, by brooks, and by rivers which seemed only a trifle larger than the brooks.

These scenes were no more successful than the Bourget novel in capturing the roving attention of the Countess, although her gaze seemed to be focused upon them. Presently, indeed, tears welled to her eyes, and she sought her handkerchief to

wipe them away. The melancholy, however, which shadowed her face was not precisely a tragic melancholy. Her emotion, even to an indifferent observer, would have appeared to be petty. It had in it that ephemeral quality which is distinguishable in the eyes of a young girl who has just been refused permission to go out to a party.

What was the Countess thinking of, what souvenirs had disturbed her, to cause her these moments of self-pity? As, it is said, happens to a drowning man, twenty years had rushed pell-mell into her consciousness. In this mental process there was no chronology, no arrangement, even, sometimes, no clarity. She recalled the fields of France, sprinkled with scarlet and saffron poppies and bright blue corn-flowers; an Opéra bal, which she had attended in the guise of Froufrou, obsessed her memory, and she began to hum la Valse des roses; a dinner at Tortoni's with the Duc de Vallombrosa, the Vicomte de Sarcus, Monsieur and Madame de Beschevet; a box of bonbons from Boissier, with an unforgettable card. . . . She remembered how she had met her husband at a Charity Ball in Chicago—how long ago?—twenty or twenty-five years? She could not be certain. Then, a few years later, his sudden death in Venice, his entombment in the mausoleum at Ravenna, the picturesque mourning garments which Worth had created for her. Quite abruptly other pictures displaced these: moments at the Paris Exposition of

1889, Sybil Sanderson in Esclarmonde, a dinner on the platform of the Tour Eiffel, a breakfast at the Pavillon Henri IV at St. Germain. Again, she considered her pink and gold salon in Paris, with its countless, miniature, beflowered, white porcelain figures of Saxe and Sèvres, mounted on gold or enamelled bases. For this room Bouguereau had painted one of his prettiest, most waxy Italian peasants, and on another wall hung her own portrait by Carolus-Duran, in which she was represented wearing a gown with successive flounces of yellow lace, a full-blown, red rose in her belt, standing before a background of marble terraces and clipped limes. But always at the root of her mind stirred the thought of Tony, and always, despite her protracted effort to drive it away, this memory rose to inspire the tears in her eyes.

She had encountered Tony, a blond French boy of surpassing handsomeness and twenty-two years, ten months ago in the Quinconces at Bordeaux. From the very beginning she had been vaguely aware that he was stupid, what the French call bête, that he dressed like a cabot, and that he had the habits and manners of a maquereau. Nevertheless, from the moment that she first saw him she felt that she belonged to him completely. His name was Antoine Dupuy and he was a tenor in a travelling operetta troupe. She remembered him with especial delight as Frederic, Prince of Pisa, in La Mascotte, a rôle in which she had seen him the night before their

meeting. How fine he had appeared in his royal blue doublet and hose; how valiantly he had assisted in the celebrated presage quartet; how vigorously he had attacked his Ra-ta-plan air in the last act! Later, she had heard him sing Grenicheux in Les Cloches de Corneville—could she ever forget the Barcarolle?—Marasquin in Giroflé-Girofla, Valentine in Olivette, and, above all, Paris in La Belle Hélène:

> Evohé! que ces déesses
> Pour enjôler les garçons
> Ont de drôles de façons!

She could still feel the flush of blood to her cheeks at the moment when she first met him in the park. She had spoken to him, told him how greatly she had admired his performance in La Mascotte, and he had accepted her praise, she recalled, much in the manner that Jean de Reszke might receive encomiums in regard to his interpretation of Raoul in Les Huguenots. Then, she had asked him to dine with her. She knew then, she knew now, how ridiculous she had been. She knew that his reason for accepting her attentions was based on his correct suspicion that she was rich. She could analyze his motives now. She was conscious, indeed, that she must always have known, really, in some subterranean chamber of her mind, just how far his affections carried. At the time, however, she had stifled logical thought, common sense, for she had fallen

deeply in love with the boy, and idealized his feeling for her until it had seemed that she had never before been so happy. She had even been on the point at one time, she recalled with shame, of offering him marriage. She had, as a matter of fact, done something even worse: she had thrown caution into the waste-basket—with certain essential reservations, for in her most impulsive acts she always retained a regard for the convenances—and had travelled with the troupe . . . as his mistress. She buried her face in her hands . . . as his mistress! Dijon, Avignon, Orange, Nîmes . . . where not? Gradually, she had become aware that Mlle. Gabrielle Desparges, the soprano of the organization, herself held some kind of lien on the tenor. Occasionally Tony had excused himself, explaining that he was too tired to dine with the Countess. By bribing a waiter it was easy to discover that Mlle. Desparges had dined with him in his room. And how much these infidelities cost the Countess in gold as well as pain! He was spending *her* money on this woman! Degradation, it would seem, could go no further, but it did. She had paid his amende, borne him off to Paris, and established him in an apartment in the Rue de la Pompe. There she had visited him, except for the few occasions when she had bidden him come to her. The pink salon was darkened, the blinds drawn. My God! how happy she had been! What weeks of pleasure until . . . One day she had told him that

she would take tea with the Princesse de Laumes. Some vague fear had caused her to change her mind; some instinctive and minatory doubt drove her rather to visit the Rue de la Pompe. She passed the concierge without a challenge as she had passed her so many times before, ascended the stairs to the second storey, and inserted her key in the door of his apartment. In the salon she had found them: Mlle. Desparges in her chemise, he in his caleçon. She had been ready to retire, to forget what she had seen. Why had she come at all? Then she could have pretended not to know. It was too late. Her pride proved stronger than her desire: she had reproached him, even cursed him. He had laughed, stroking his paltry blond moustache, and, turning to Mlle. Desparges, had muttered: Quelle vieille gueuse! Blind with fury and pain she had fled. Two days went by without a word from him. How much she loved him! What difference could it make to her if he loved this other? It was her supreme humiliation to be aware that nothing he could do had the power to kill her desire for him. She must see him again. She had sent him a petit bleu. No reply. Again she visited the apartment in the Rue de la Pompe. She found the rooms in the greatest disorder; all his clothes were gone. He had, it was fairly obvious, decamped. She recalled that three weeks earlier, at his urgent request—he could not, he had asserted, continually be asking a woman for money—she had established an

account in his name, at the Crédit Lyonnais, depositing 50,000 francs. And now Mlle. Desparges was spending this! For the three days following the Countess was unable to see anybody. She had attack after attack of hysterics. She had lain awake all night and sobbed all day. Two of her servants, weary of this futile exhibition of temperament, had given notice. Then, one day, she had flung herself prone on the floor, desolate and despairing. How long had she remained there? She could not now be certain, but she recalled that she had not shed a tear. Her grief was too deep for tears, but the idea of suicide had raced into her brain, and she considered the possible means of suicide at hand. On her dressing-table stood a little vial of bichloride of mercury tablets, the drawer of her escritoire harboured a loaded revolver with a handle of black and gold Toledo work, and there was always the Seine. She had remembered that some one had told her that potassium cyanide, with its faint odour of peach-blossoms, was an excellent, sudden, and painless method of terminating one's existence. But she had failed to kill herself; she had not been equal to this demand on her courage. Instead, she had tried the alternative of going back into the great world, searching consolation, sympathy, without naming the cause of her grief, but after she had observed the enchanted expression in one or two pair of eyes, which made no effort to conceal their satisfaction at the sight of an

unhappy woman, she quickly withdrew again, shutting her doors, and giving Jean orders to admit no callers.

It was during this period of self-enforced seclusion that she had remembered a sentiment which she had once expressed to Edmond de Goncourt—he had embedded it in his diary: Une femme me disait ce soir, qu'elle croyait qu'un grand chagrin pouvait mourir dans la paix, le calme, l'isolement de la campagne, mais qu'à Paris, l'enfiévrement de la vie ambiante autour de ce chagrin, ne pouvait que l'exaspérer. She had been speaking of another woman, but now she realized that the cure might be efficacious in her own case. So she planned a trip to Sicily, and another to the Swiss Alps, but these never went beyond the preparations. Marie had packed her trunks, and then the Countess had changed her mind. There could be, she knew too well, no forgetfulness in these excursions. Everywhere she would miss Tony and wish he were beside her to share her pleasure, which would be no pleasure, indeed, were he not there.

Another week dragged by, a week of misery, of pain, of acute suffering, of desolation. Not a word came from Tony to officialize the break, to relieve the strain. He was silent; he had remained silent up to this present moment. At first, this silence on his part seemed heartless to her, even brutal; at first, when she was still under some vague illusion that he must have loved her. Now that even this

illusion had deserted her, now that she was able to think back and recall that during the whole course of their relationship he had never once kissed her unless she had first asked him to do so, now that she remembered how guarded he had been in his forced protestations of fondness, she understood only too well how he had felt from the beginning, how he had only half reciprocated—and half was perhaps an exaggeration—the deep affection she had lavished on him, how he had tolerated her advances with a certain good-natured calculation, how he had responded half-heartedly to her full-hearted outpouring, how he had even rejected certain of her maddest suggestions, how, in short, he was, by type and birth, a cabot and a maquereau, and, above all, a youth, with every one of the normal desires of youth. And yet, she was now confessing to herself, she still loved him.

A line from Victor Hugo wandered, inexplicably, into her mind: Je suis veuf, je suis seul, et sur moi le soir tombe. Yes, she was growing old; she had admitted this freely after her first two days of loneliness; she had been relentless and cruel to herself. She had compelled herself to gaze at her fading reflection in the great oval glass with its ornate Louis XV gilt frame, which stood in her dressing-room. She was old; she was fifty, and now, for the first time, her anxiety was making her look her full age. Until Tony had deserted her, she had been carefree; fairness made her add the word comparatively.

Nothing—well, not very much—had troubled her, and she had appeared to be quite astonishingly young, but Tony's departure had added years to her age, made her seem older even than she really was. He had caused her hours of worry, hours which had added new lines to the crow's-feet which were already gathering around her eyes, new lines to those which already encircled her throat. Even before he had abandoned her there had been a premonition of this coming disaster: one afternoon at tea, she had noted that her hand trembled as she lifted her cup, so fearful had she been that Tony would not kiss her when she asked him to. Her apprehension had proved not to be without foundation; Tony had been cold and distant that day, and he had refused to kiss her, refused even to accept her kiss, pleading a headache. Now she knew why. This incident had occurred two weeks before the last day that she had seen him. He had known that their relationship would soon end, and although, during the following days, he had been over-attentive for the same reason, she had had the sense, quite clearly, she saw in retrospect, of impending doom.

Time and time again she reviewed these scenes, and others connected with her life with Tony; they seemed to be the only phases of her career which had left an imprint on her character, stirred her imagination, and as the train spurted ahead, stopping nowhere, she had again indulged in this passionate and futile pastime. Hope, however, had quitted

her. She knew that the end had come. She had known this when she had tried to bring herself to do away with her life; she had known this when she had abandoned her projected excursions to Sicily and Switzerland; above all, she had known it when she had tried to face the gaiety of Paris. She had left Paris before the Fête aux Fleurs in the Bois; before Duse's début in the French capital. For the first time in many years she was missing the Grand Steeple Chase at Auteuil, the Grand Prix de Longchamps. She had been invited to visit Lady Adela Beaminster in London, to stop at Portland Place during the festivities in honour of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. She had found this invitation, too, easy to decline in her present mood. In any case, she could not, at this time, contemplate the idea of facing the horrible old Duchess of Wrexe. One alternative of conduct remained, it occurred to her one day, a day passed entirely in bed, interrupted only by frequent fretful complaints directed at her maid and occasional vain efforts to interest herself in a new novel, and that was the experiment of a reversion to type. Would, she wondered, a return to the scenes where she had spent her childhood, girlhood, and young womanhood, scenes which she had not visited for twenty—or was it twenty-five?—years, succeed in making her forget? Would she be able, after more than two radiant decades of European society, to arrange a new, if somewhat different career against the background of the past?

Her father, a rich banker, had been dead two years. Her mother had died when she was a child; she could barely remember her. But there was the old home—without much difficulty she recalled its 1873 white brick outlines, great bow-windows projecting from almost every room, the turrets and cupolas, the roof of slate, and the tall white brick chimneys—and there was her sister Lou. Lou she had seen occasionally, but she had met her in London or Paris, where this spinster sister seemed strangely ill at ease and out of place. Lou had none of the adaptability of the Countess, none of the latter's graceful worldliness. She was as plain and commonplace as a female robin humbly chirping beside its better-feathered mate. In Paris she was entirely out of the picture. In Maple Valley, on the other hand, Lou held a position of considerable prominence, based on race and money and permanent residence. But even in Paris, little as the two had in common, the Countess had not found her sister unsympathetic. Lou's presence had the soothing virtue of making Ella feel younger, reminding her of the days when they had attended college together at Cornell in Mt. Vernon. It had even amused her to listen to Lou's chatter about her neighbours and friends, people whose names never entered the Countess's mind except when she was with her sister, and while Lou would never have been able to understand the Countess's life or fit into it, she never asked uncomfortable questions, largely, the Count-

ess reflected, because of a complete and rather smug satisfaction with her own provincial mode of existence which prevented her from exhibiting, or even feeling, any considerable curiosity regarding the lives of others. Lou accepted Ella because Ella was her sister, and it never occurred to her that there had been any metamorphosis since Ella had become the Countess Nattatorrini. Have I changed, after all? the Countess asked herself. As a girl she had always been brilliant and daring, Lou drab and conventional, but the life of a widow in European capitals—for the Count had died five years subsequent to their marriage—had offered opportunities for the expansion of these qualities. She had never, however, she recollected with a great deal of complacency, overstepped the boundaries of discretion. Even in her tempestuous affair with Tony she had been circumspect in certain important particulars. During the tournée they had invariably engaged separate rooms in the hotels, and in Paris she had never met him save in his apartment or her own. She had never forfeited the respect of the Faubourg—although once or twice she had come dangerously near to doing so—never, indeed, lost touch with it, until this crisis in her affairs had made it impossible for her to consider going anywhere. She was quite fully aware then that there existed no unalterable cleavage between her and her past, no break that could not, conceivably, be crutched.

To Maple Valley, through the mouth of her sister, she was merely an Iowa girl who had had the good fortune to marry an Italian nobleman with whom she had lived in his villa outside Ravenna until he died, when her position and her desire made it a simple matter for her to claim a social rank of considerable eminence in Paris. This much these folk would know about her, and little besides. Her friends would be middle-aged. Some of them would have married and have left Maple Valley. There would be the nucleus of a new group, a new generation, and she felt that she could safely entrust her broken heart to this new group, against the security of the familiar background—a background so familiar that on certain dull, rainy days, sitting in her rose salon on the Avenue Gabriel, she had sometimes diverted herself by reconstructing it, from the unpaved streets to the station—with some difficulty she recalled the American word depot—before which the trains stopped.

At any rate, she had determined on this step as the only feasible move that remained for her to make, and she had made it. This time, after she had instructed Marie to pack her trunks, the order had not been countermanded. This time, after cabling her sister, she had boarded the train for Havre, and embarked on the steamship for New York. And, to make the distinction between her present and the past she hoped to recreate as complete as possible, she had left Marie in Paris, travel-

ling, perhaps for the first time in her life, without a maid.

The train was running more slowly now along the shore of a river, the banks of which rose high into wooded hills, deep blue and green in the glow of the setting sun. Presently, river, hills, and trees faded from view; wooden houses began to appear; the two tracks expanded into five. Now, through the windows, freight-cars, modest warehouses, and factories were to be observed. There was movement in the car. The Countess extracted powder-puff and lip-stick from her bag and applied them to her face, holding a mirror in her left hand. As she bent forward to replace her toilet articles, she saw a pin, the point towards her, gleaming on the floor. Extremely superstitious, she stooped to pick it up, and inserted it in her waist-band. Gratefully, she recalled that she was not entering her natal city on Friday. The Negro porter was busily engaged brushing the dust from passengers' garments, collecting bags and depositing them on the platform of the car. Ella's turn came and, as she stood up in the aisle, a curious impression of lonely embarrassment beset her. Had she made another error? Could she go through with it? She felt friendless and helpless as the train came to a full stop, and the conductor shouted: Maple Valley!

Chapter II

The Parcæ are not exclusively residents of Athens. Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, sometimes in dual rather than triple form, preside over human destinies in every town in the middle west. Unlike their classic eponyms, however, they do not occupy themselves spinning a thread from wool. They are accustomed, rather, to animate rocking-chairs. Frequently they chew gum.

The railroad tracks which ran through Maple Valley cut the town into two parts, the business section on one side, the residence district on the other. On Leclair Avenue, in the block above the tracks on the residence side, surrounded by boarding-houses, and adjoined by at least one candy-shop that had strayed into the neighbourhood and looked a little shy, stood a double-house, that is two houses identically constructed of timber painted a blue white, united in the middle like the Siamese twins. The porch floor of these houses formed one continuous level, but the two sections were separated by a fence, so that, in order to go from one to another, it was necessary to descend a step. These porches commanded an enviable view of the goings and comings of the inhabitants of Maple

Valley. Everybody, indeed, passed them at least once a week; almost everybody passed them once or twice a day.

One of these houses was occupied by Mrs. Bierbauer, an excessively stout female whose husband, Eddie Bierbauer, was a travelling salesman for a Chicago wholesale house; in the other dwelt Mrs. Fox, a scraggy, wizened woman, whose consort served as conductor on a railroad, the headquarters of which were located at Maple Valley. Neither of these women was blessed with offspring; neither of them boasted any social connections. They had, however, each other. Their combined ages amounted to ninety years. Divide this sum by two and you would have the exact age of either.

As the husbands of both were abroad most of the time, and as their houses were small and contained only the absolutely essential articles of furniture, neither of them was compelled to devote much time to housework. Shortly after an early breakfast, the necessary sweeping and dusting out of the way, the occasional baking or washing accomplished, clad in pink or blue or yellow calico wrappers, their hair severely combed back and tied in knots, they both emerged from their houses, usually at almost precisely the same moment, so entirely ceremonial had this habit become in the course of years, sat down in rocking-chairs, each on her own piazza, and began to rock, and observe, and comment. During the warm

season they sat thus for two or three hours in the morning; they sat thus for two or three hours in the afternoon; they sat thus for two or three hours in the evening. They had been sitting thus for fifteen years, and they would sit thus, unless the houses were torn down, or one of them died, for forty more, rocking back and forth, dealing out destinies in badly placed, but discreetly smothered voices. They were acquainted with all the gossip of the town. What they could not acquire from direct observation they learned through the butcher- or baker- or grocer-boy, or over the clothes-lines in the back-yard from the neighbours' servants.

At exactly eight o'clock in the morning of June 17, 1897, Mrs. Bierbauer opened her screen-door and waddled out into the open. A moment later she was rocking back and forth in her clumsy, wooden chair, scanning the street north and south, like the night-watch on a battleship peering into the deep for periscopes. At one minute past eight, Mrs. Fox, mindful that flies and moths and other insect vermin were especially pestiferous this summer, opened her screen-door to the slightest possible degree and slid out in the manner of the slender Bernhardt of the eighties leaving Scarpia's room in La Tosca. She bowed to her friend.

Mornin', Mrs. Bierbauer.

Mornin', Mrs. Fox. You're a little late this mornin'.

It was characteristic of the formal nature of their

relationship that neither had ever addressed the other by her Christian name.

I was thinkin' you were a little early.

No, jes' the same as usual. Mrs. Bierbauer, with some effort, bent forward and stooped to pluck a withered leaf from a pathetic umbrella-plant which was not trying very hard to grow in a pink and blue jardinière which stood on the edge of her porch.

That Barnes man jes' went by, she continued, to a considerable extent deprived of breath after her exertion.

Have you heard about his daughter? Lemme see, Bertha, is it?

Her name's Clara, Clara Barnes.

Mrs. Bierbauer fanned herself with a palm-leaf fan. The snoring and snorting and wheezing of Mrs. Fox's fat and asthmatic pug-dog, Free Silver, prone and panting at his mistress's feet, was extremely audible.

That's so, Mrs. Bierbauer, her name *is* Clara, now that I think on it. Anyhow you know she's been singin' at church sociables and such, and now they've decided to send her to Chicago to study.

There won't nothin' come of it; Mrs. Bierbauer's voice assumed a darkly prophetic tone.

What's that? Mrs. Fox had understood the original pronouncement, but it was the kind of remark she enjoyed hearing repeated.

I say there won't nothin' come of it.

You think not, Mrs. Bierbauer?

I know it, the pinguid female snapped. Nothin' ever come of any o' that family. Her ma was a church singer in Watertown, but when she got married she give it up, and hain't sung a note since. I don't believe she's good enough for the Maple Valley Congregational Church choir; they'd have her if she was.

With a fastuous air of finality Mrs. Bierbauer folded her hands over her vast expanse of stomach. Mrs. Fox reached for the long handle of a wire fly-swatter which lay on the floor beside her chair, and began a vigorous attack on the flies.

Flies is awful this summer, she averred.

An' mosquitoes.

An' moths.

An' roaches.

An' . . .

Mrs. Fox! The look of surprised distaste gradually faded from Mrs. Bierbauer's eyes as she composed herself to question: How's your balsams, Mrs. Fox?

They're doin' better. How's your peonies?

Nearly gone. The phlox is comin' along. There's worms in the tomato vines, Mrs. Bierbauer announced in the identical manner with which Olga Nethersole that very night, in whatever metropolitan playhouse she was appearing, would inform her leading-man how sinful her past had been.

There's Dr. Sinclair drivin' down.

S'pose he's goin' to call on Mrs. Wiltbank, Mrs. Bierbauer put forward.

O! do you think . . . ?

She ain't no more sick than you are, Mrs. Fox, an' he goes callin' on her every day. It's a blessin' his wife don't catch on!

She ain't none too spry these days.

He orter be home carin' for her 'stead o' gallivantin' round with well folks.

The doctor, driving his buggy, passed the house.

Mornin', doctor, Mrs. Bierbauer hailed him in her most ingratiating tones.

Good morning, Mrs. Bierbauer, the physician replied. Nice weather we're having.

Too hot! she shouted. Her expression changed as she turned to her friend. Did you see him? she demanded triumphantly. He was red as a beet!

At this juncture Mrs. Bierbauer's black tom-cat came out from under the porch, walked up the steps, his tail high in the air, approached his mistress, sniffed her feet once or twice, circled around several times, rubbed his side ecstatically against the pink and blue jardinière, and finally curled up in a ball and fell asleep.

Trilby ain't been feelin' very well.

What's the matter with him?

He et a robin last week. I think it's the feathers.

In the house next door an invisible pair of hands began to pound out Ethelbert Nevin's Narcissus at a terrific tempo.

I jes' love music, Mrs. Fox declared.

I don't know jes' what I'd do without music an' flowers, Mrs. Bierbauer assented. She regarded her frail umbrella-plant with some pride, almost with an air of motherhood.

At this moment from the street which crossed Leclair Avenue a block above the railroad tracks, a young man turned into the avenue and walked past the house. He was a tall, handsome boy, with brown hair which he parted in the centre, frank, brown eyes, a well-shaped, but rather small nose, and a firm mouth and chin. He was wearing a brown derby hat, a chocolate-shaded coat with padded shoulders, very tight tan trousers, a very high, stiff collar with an Ascot tie, and pointed, patent-leather boots. He passed the house without hailing the Parcæ. He did not know them, nor was he aware that they were Parcæ.

Gareth Johns, the town dude, exclaimed Mrs. Bierbauer.

Sissy, I call him, Mrs. Fox corroborated a little shrilly.

They're talkin' o' sendin' him to college. After he gets out I s'pose he'll come home an' do the housework.

Mrs. Fox released a little screech of pleasure at this extremely witty sally.

You do say the funniest things, Mrs. Bierbauer!

Well, ain't it so? What else can he do?

Foolin' round all day with that old maid schoolteacher. He orter be spanked an' put to work.

That's where he belongs, Mrs. Fox agreed. Boys o' that age ain't got no business loafin'.

You speak the gospel, Mrs. Fox. When Eddie was five years old he was earnin' his livin'.

Mr. Fox begun at ten. First thing you know, that boy'll get it in the neck where the chicken got the ax.

The invisible hands in the next house, having pounded out Narcissus four times, began a relentlessly fortissimo assault on To a wild rose. Reflectively, Mrs. Bierbauer scratched a mosquito bite on her flabby, red wrist. Presently she spoke again: Old man Baker's gone on another toot.

You don't say!

To Chicago. Eddie saw him goin' into a burlesque show. There was livin' pitchers an' hoochie-coochie dancers.

It's a blessin' his wife don't know about him. Her piety'd get an awful whack if she heard that!

Yes, an' her always goin' round convertin' people. She came here oncet. She'd orter begin at home.

At this point Trilby suddenly woke up, opened first one eye, then the other, made a quick snap at a fly, caught it, chewed it, swallowed it, and went back to sleep, after emitting a sigh of content. The snoring and snorting and wheezing of Free Silver

continued. Mrs. Bierbauer was scanning the columns of the Maple Valley Star.

I see, she observed presently, that they got boats now what go under water.

What do they call 'em?

Submarines. They've invented telephones an' telegraphs an' electric lights an' steam locomobiles. It's certainly wonderful what they've invented. . . . And now there's the X Ray.

What's that?

Why they turn a light on a body an' you can see right through.

'Tain't decent. What's it for?

To see your insides, Mrs. Fox. It's for doctors.

It's certainly wonderful the things they're inventin'. Who'd've thought it a few years ago?

They can't go no further. Some fools still think they can fly, but they can't go no further. It'd be slappin' the face o' God if they did.

The piano no longer sounded. In her nasal voice Mrs. Bierbauer began to sing softly:

> She was bred in old Kentucky,
> Take her, boy, you're mighty lucky . . .

Suddenly, she broke off. Look! she cried, pointing up the street to a youth curved over the handlebars of his bicycle on which he was coasting down hill. There's that Ray Cameron scorchin' again. He'll kill himself.

'Twon't be no great loss. He ain't had no bringin' up since his mother's took drugs.

They say 'twas that time she had rheumatiz she took morphine to stop the pains.

Well, she's mighty queer most o' the time now. She went past here yesterday while you was makin' the bed without a hat on.

Without a hat!

Yes.

What next! She'll be goin' without her corsets soon.

Or her skirt.

Or her waist.

Or her shoes.

They'll lock her up in the lunatic asylum. An' her son out scorchin' on a bicycle!

The sunlight caught the glint of Mrs. Bierbauer's gold front teeth. She lifted a novel in a yellow cover from the top of a table, bereft of varnish by nights of inclement weather.

Have you read Gunter's new book? she asked.

I don't get much time to read, you know, Mrs. Bierbauer, Mrs. Fox apologized.

I don't neither but this is quite a good book. After you get your chores done you might want to borrow it.

I've got to make some fried-cakes today. Mr. Fox is partial to fried-cakes with his coffee.

What does he say about the country?

He says everything'll be all right now with McKinley. Cleveland . . .

I know! Them Democrats! Since Carter Harrison's been elected mayor o' Chicago there's been more holdups an' crime. It's always that way when the Democrats is in.

That's right. That's what Mr. Fox says.

That's what Eddie says.

That Price girl next door's gettin' married, the hired-girl tells me, Mrs. Fox confided. You know she was down to Marshalltown last month.

Some Marshalltown feller?

Yes, he's blind. I says to the hired-girl, Well, it mighta been worse; he mighta lost his arms. He has, she says.

There was a pause. Trilby, in a dream, began twitching his tail and rubbing his paw mechanically over his nose. Free Silver snorted and snored and wheezed. Mrs. Bierbauer, absent-mindedly, again referred to the Star, humming to herself:

> Mistah Johnson, turn me loose;
> Got no money but a good excuse . . .

As her attention became concentrated on the society column she gradually ceased to sing. Both females continued to rock.

Well, I declare, she exclaimed, after a moment's perusal of the sheet, that Countess's comin' back.

Who? What Countess?

Lou Poore's sister. She ain't been here for twenty years, the paper says. She married an Eyetalian. I bet she'll notice changes. This town ain't the same place it was twenty years ago.

I should say not.

There's the new water-works . . .

An' soon there'll be the new depot . . .

An' brick pavin' . . .

Iowa's gettin' to be a pretty important state. The biggest battleship in the navy's named after Iowa.

That's so.

Children were passing the house on their way to school; business men on their way to business. Mrs. Townsend, bound for market, drove by in her surrey. On a neighbouring lawn, the grass of which grew in irregular clumps, a robin, smart, alert, and scarlet-breasted, pecked worms from the turf, swallowed them, then gazed about with pride as he hopped, hopped. The Parcæ continued to rock.

Chapter III

As the Countess Nattatorrini, followed by the porter carrying her bag, descended from the train, broaching her parasol to ward off the rays of the sun, her eyes swept the platform with some embarrassment. A moment later she caught sight of her passerine sister waiting, motionless, before the wrong car, and she walked slowly down the platform to join her. It was a constant source of astonishment to her that this thin, spinster-like person, who wore clothes but who had no idea how to dress, was her sister. Lou was now gazing in every direction but the right one, a procedure entirely characteristic of her, thought the Countess. Lou turned, indeed, only when the Countess tapped her shoulder.

Ella! she cried, I've been looking for you everywhere.

Lou dear!

There was something subconsciously internecine in their embrace.

I'm afraid you'll find it rather hot here. We're having unusually warm weather for Maple Valley, were her next words.

O, I'm used to warm weather; I don't mind it,

the Countess responded. I'm glad to see you, anyway, glad to be home.

You'll find many changes. The town has grown a good deal.

I'm sure it has, the Countess replied. Why, here's William! How are you, William?

William grunted a reply. Hardly ever did he permit his lips to form words. Stoop-shouldered, grizzly, he had been the Poores' hired-man for thirty years. He took charge of Ella's bag, which the porter had deposited on the platform, and the strange trio walked through the carious wooden station to the carriage which, drawn by its two bay horses with long, sweeping tails, waited by the kerb. Seth Poore never could tolerate the barbarity of bobbing.

As they drove up Pleasant Avenue, bordered on either side with pigmy parks between the side-walks and the street, in which were planted straight rows of elms, whose branches met and even interlocked, forming a canopy, a roof of leaves over the carriage, the Countess gave little exclamations of delight. She made remarks, too, concerning the houses, each set in the centre of a spacious lawn, well back from the avenue; many of these she remembered, and she questioned her sister regarding the new ones. Who lives in that great colonial barn? The new druggist. And in that brick palace? That's Mayor Lansing's house. O! Colonel Blount's house! Is he still alive? No, when he

died he left so little money that the family was obliged to sell the property. Mrs. Blount keeps a boarding-house on Leclair Avenue. Do you remember Alice Leatherbury? The Countess gave an affirmative nod. She's practically lost her mind, Lou went on, stooping to pluck a long black horsehair from the light lap-robe which covered their skirts. She is a sad thing to see—not a flash of recognition for anybody. She's never dressed, never taken from bed except to care for her. That's Susie Clerihew's old house. She behaved shamefully. Sam Bellows, a new lawyer, came to town and she saw a good deal of him, too much. When her husband died it was found that he had added $20,000 extra to her bequest in the will on condition that she marry Sam within a year. What did she do? the Countess demanded. She married Sam, Lou replied, but they had to leave town.

Lou gradually became slightly stiffer, not quite informal in her replies. Frequently she indulged in furtive, sidelong glances at her sister. It was apparent that something was bothering her. Suddenly she touched the arm of the Countess appealingly, and almost in a whisper, so that William could not catch her words, she pleaded: Ella, please don't be offended, but I don't believe Maple Valley will understand your rouge.

Why Lou! the Countess exclaimed with some surprise, I'm scarcely made up at all.

There isn't a woman in town who paints, Lou explained timidly. I know how they do in Paris. I've seen them when I've been with you. I suppose it's quite fin de siècle there (it took Ella some days to learn that Lou used this popular phrase as a synonym for fashionable) but nobody here would understand. They'd just think you were fast.

I can't get along without a little make-up, the Countess replied, in a conciliatory manner, apparently with morigeration, not wishing to quarrel so soon with her sister, but I'll use as little as possible. You've no idea what a fright I look without it. Besides it gives me confidence. After my lips are made up I can say things I couldn't have said before.

Silently, Lou regarded her sister. Women past middle-age in Maple Valley did not hold personal beauty as an end in itself, she reflected. Ella evidently considered it important to look young. Well, she was a Countess; perhaps they would permit her an eccentricity or two.

The horses drew up before the white brick house, built in the early seventies, which the Countess remembered so well. Set high above the street on a grass terrace, which was supported three feet above the level of the side-walk by a stone wall, this mansion was surrounded by great oak-trees, their spreading branches shading the well-kept lawn.

Why, it hasn't changed at all! Ella cried. Not

the least bit! It's just the way it was when I left. How slowly trees grow! She appeared to be happy, buoyant. A shadow of melancholy, however, hovered over her heart. The sight of this house reminded her unpleasantly of the passage of time. She was twenty odd years older than she had been when she had gazed upon it last. Vaguely, the feeling revived that she had made a mistake in coming back.

Ascending the stone steps to the terrace, and then the other flight to the porch, they passed on through the entrance, barred only by an unfastened screen-door, into the gloomy hallway. Ella rapidly penetrated the wide double-doorway on the left to the library, lined to the ceiling on every hand with black-walnut bookcases (one of which appeared to contain a complete bound file of Harper's New Monthly Magazine) and then through to her father's old study, behind the library, which still preserved his work-desk, a dictionary on a revolving stand, and a great globe, marked with the continents and islands and oceans of the world. This room now was evidently employed as a sewing-room, for the floor was piled with neat heaps of denim garments, and a sewing-machine, from which the cover had been removed, stood in a corner.

The ladies of the Aid Society have been here today sewing for the poor, Lou explained, as she stooped to gather stray threads from the carpet. We do, she went on sententiously, a great deal of

good for the poor. Everybody is very generous and helpful.

Ella scarcely was listening. The tears came into her eyes. Just the same! she murmured to herself. Just the same! Just as I remember it. Poor father!

Recrossing the hall, followed by Lou, she entered the parlour on the right, papered in an ugly shade of brown. The polished oak blinds were closed, but even in the dim light she recognized the Wilton carpet, or a new one which resembled the old one, the marble fireplace with its gilded scrolls, the Rogers group on a stand near the window, and the heavy brass chandelier, with its four gas-burners with their engraved ground-glass globes, but sometime recently this chandelier had been wired and now there were four electric globes as well. A few of the pictures and a good deal of the furniture appeared to be new, although Ella at once recalled the steel-engraving of Napoleon crossing the Alps, now resting on a polished oak easel. There were reproductions in colour of a painting by Ridgway Knight of two peasant girls hailing a ferry and of a canvas by Alma Tadema representing two Roman matrons in purple and white reclining on a marble podium. There was a photograph, printed in a blue tone, of the Court of Honour at the Chicago World's Fair and a Copley print of the Countess Potocka, framed in a wide black frame. The machine-carved oak furniture was upholstered in a

design of oak-leaves and acorns. Near the window stood a grand piano, by the side of which towered a brass piano-lamp with a pink silk shade, bordered with two rows of ruffles. The silk cushions on the couch were also ruffled. There were hassocks and tabourets, on one of which reposed a folio volume stamped World's Fair Views (the Countess was reminded that she had nearly visited the Fair with her friend, the Infanta Eulalia) and a cut-glass vase which held a number of souvenir spoons. The Countess regarded these with some curiosity. The handle of one spoon shaped itself like the head of a bison, and the legend in the bowl read: Greetings from Buffalo. Another was a Chicago I will! spoon. The handle of the spoon from New Orleans represented a live-oak-tree. Still other spoons were reminders of the World's Fair, of San Francisco, of Yellowstone National Park, of the Mammoth Cave, of Niagara Falls.

Did you bring me a souvenir spoon from Paris? Lou asked.

I don't believe they have any souvenir spoons of Paris, the Countess explained, rather apologetically.

On the mantelpiece, over the surface of which Lou now rubbed a finger absent-mindedly, so accustomed was she to search for dust and so subconsciously aware was she that she would not find it, several photographs in ornate gold frames mingled with fat-bellied ivory and gold vases with long cy-

lindrical stems. Ella examined the photographs in vain for familiar faces until she came upon one of herself taken by Reutlinger in 1889.

She passed on into the dining-room where she was glad to convince herself that the steel-engravings of Thorwaldsen's bas-reliefs, Night and Morning, in carved gold frames with red plush mats, still graced the walls. In every room the pictures were hung so high that one had to gaze upwards to see them.

It's nice to be home again. . . . Ella was trying to make herself believe this. . . . I wish father were with us. I'm glad to see *you* again, Lou.

She kissed her sister's faded and sallow cheek, smoothed the whitened, straggling hair, parted in the centre and bound in the back in a nondescript knot. Lou accepted these attentions shyly. She was not accustomed to them; demonstrativeness of any nature whatever was entirely foreign to her character. She was glad to see Ella, proud to have her home, but she did not say so. Constantly in the back of her mind she was repeating to herself the fact that Ella's ways were different and that she must get used to them. But the others—her friends in Maple Valley—how would they take Ella?

The Countess drew her sister back into the parlour and they seated themselves on a great upholstered couch placed against a corner of the room

in such wise that its ends protruded through the double-doorways opening on the hall and dining-room so that it would have been necessary to move this piece of furniture had one decided to close the sliding-doors. The room, however, gained some privacy through the deep brown velvet portieres which hung in the doorways.

Tell me about yourself, Lou, the Countess began sympathetically.

There's not much to tell you. I've written you everything. Lou was at a loss for words. Suddenly she brightened and went on, You'd be surprised at the number of people who remember you, who want to see you.

I suppose you're having them to dinner soon.

To dinner!

Well, not all together. I mean a series of dinners.

O, Ella, we don't give dinners here . . . except family dinners on Thanksgiving and Christmas. I don't remember that I've ever been asked to dinner. The men would have such a short time to eat before they'd have to go back to business.

The perplexity of the Countess, concerning a subject which she had originally broached merely by way of being pleasant, increased momentarily. To business? she asked. Do they work evenings then?

O, no. You must remember that we dine at noon here.

O, so you do. I had forgotten. The Countess

removed a cigarette-case from her bag, extracted a cigarette, and prepared to light it.

O, Ella, you aren't going to smoke! Lou protested.

I always do. You know that. You've seen me often enough in Paris. Again the Countess, who by nature was hot-tempered and headstrong, adopted a vaguely propitiatory tone.

But not *here*. You wouldn't smoke *here!*

Must I go to the bathroom? The Countess laughed nervously. On the train I smoked in the toilet.

O, not there, either. What would the servants think? I mean you wouldn't smoke in Maple Valley. . . .

The Countess made a swift decision. I can't be bothered, Lou, about the servants, or any one else. They'll all have to get used to me. I can't do without my cigarette. Why, grandmother smoked a pipe.

She struck a match and lighted her cigarette, while Lou's face assumed an expression which might have implied either horror or shame.

The Countess went on, lightly, What then, if not dinners?

Although Lou employed an aggrieved tone, she answered readily enough (she, too, was making an effort to be pleasant): I'm giving a reception for you tomorrow afternoon. There'll be more receptions, and kettle-drums, and euchre- and cinch-

parties. You'll be entertained everywhere. Everybody wants to see you, but dinner would be queer. Is it fin de siècle to give dinners in Paris?

Again Ella was puzzled by Lou's use of this phrase, but she replied, Well, one does.

A little later Lou escorted the Countess to her bedroom, a chamber papered in an ivory paper, sprinkled with blue flowers. A few pictures hung on wires from the white moulding. The bathroom, with its zinc tub, opened from a landing two or three steps down the hall stairs, but a wash-stand held a blue bowl and pitcher for use in emergency, and half a dozen towels, embroidered with elaborate P's were suspended on a brass rod above this stand. A table, the bureau, the upholstered chairs, the bed were all of a light, machine-carved, polished maple, and the bed was covered with a lace spread, while a bolster supported the pillows, hidden beneath lace pillow-shams.

Left to herself, Ella rearranged her hair, washed her face and hands, and changed her dress. She put on a frock of pale lilac batiste, which exposed her arms to the elbow. Then, as the bell for supper had not yet sounded, once more she looked about the room. She examined a picture by F. S. Church in which a fanciful maiden in a filmy gown fed two bears and a crane from a chafing-dish. On the table lay a few books; among them she noted a novel by Gertrude Atherton: Patience Sparhawk. She recalled that she had met Mrs.

Atherton with Sybil Sanderson during the Paris Exposition of 1889. She remembered the woman well, her plaits of straw-coloured hair bound round her head like a coronet, her fresh, startling beauty, her wit, her superabundant vitality. It had been some time since she had read a novel of hers; perhaps A Whirl Asunder had been the last. She determined to read Patience Sparhawk. Flipping the leaves of the current Harper's she discovered that a new serial by the author of Trilby was running in it. It seemed pleasant to meet so many French words and phrases in an American magazine.

At supper, a little later, she and Lou sat at a table long enough for twelve in the great dining-room with its high ceiling. The Countess was appalled when it came to her how many times Lou must have sat at this table in this forbidding room entirely alone. A sciapodous Bohemian girl, in a shirt-waist and skirt—servants in Maple Valley did not don cap and apron; it was not considered democratic—and great bulging boots, waited on them. Most of the servants in the town, Ella soon discovered, were Bohemians. The supper was a good, home-cooked meal of a kind which had become strange to the Countess, but which, nevertheless, she enjoyed. It seemed a sacrilege to cut asparagus into small sections and boil it in cream, but she found that it tasted good, eaten from a side-dish with a spoon. Nor did she balk at the lettuce

chopped into bits and doused with sugar and vinegar —olive oil, apparently, was not a recognized commodity in Maple Valley. She rather fancied the silver castor holding cruets, the cut-glass finger-bowls in which floated sprigs of lemon-verbena, and the flat, cut-glass dish, rectangular in shape, filled with purple pansies and maiden-hair ferns, which decorated the centre of the table. One incident, however, marred the meal for her. She upset the salt-cellar, spilling the salt. She cast a bit over her shoulder, but, nevertheless, she feared that something untoward was going to happen.

During the meal the conversation brightened somewhat. Each sister was becoming freer, less self-conscious, under the supposedly rigid scrutiny of the other. In time, each thought, it was possible that this sense of being watched would disappear. Lou was finding the greater difficulty in adjusting herself; she had discovered, almost immediately after Ella had descended the stairs, a new cause for anxiety. She did not, however, speak of this at once. It was not, indeed, until they were eating the chopped lettuce that she found courage to observe:

Ella, you've been tattooed.

Yes. As in a revery the Countess recalled the day that she had submitted to this torture, as an additional bond which bound her to Tony. Lou's remark was a reminder both pleasant and painful and its implications did not reach Ella's conscious-

ness at first. A moment later, recollecting herself, she echoed, Yes, in a slightly more uneasy tone. What, she asked herself, was coming next?

Why were you tattooed? Is it fin de siècle?

Why, no, Lou; it's eternal.

O, I know it lasts! *Why* did you do it?

Ella prepared to dive: It was a wager.

But on the wrist, where it *shows!* It wouldn't have been so bad if it had been on the back or the . . . thigh, where it could be covered.

Is that why it matters, because it shows?

Lou opened her eyes very wide. Why, of course, she replied, apparently astonished by the question. That is the sort of thing we would keep hidden here.

Ella smiled. Well, she said, I don't think it's anything to be ashamed of. Had I thought so I wouldn't have had it done, but I suppose our point of view is different. The only things I try to hide are my charities. When I help some one along through a scant year or a period of sickness I don't talk about it. But this! Why I'm proud of it!

No more was said of the matter at this time. The conversation was forced back—a process in which each did her part—to their parents, to their father's last hours—he had died while the Countess was in Africa—and to the sisters' college days. After a half-hour or so of this Ella began to yawn, admitting that she was thoroughly fatigued. The long trip across the country, she explained, had

done her up. Lou again escorted her to her bedroom, kissing her good-night.

Breakfast, she announced, is served at eight o'clock.

Eight o'clock! the Countess cried in dismay, and then repeated: Eight o'clock!

Yes, Lou responded.

But I always have breakfast in bed, whenever I wake up.

I'm sorry, Ella, that you have become accustomed to European habits. Unless you were ill, the servants would leave if they had to carry breakfast upstairs. We will eat together in the dining-room.

After her sister had gone, the Countess stood for a moment regarding her reflection in the circular mirror set over her bureau before she began to take the pins out of her hair and undress. Once her clothes were off, she drew on a night-gown, and over that a filmy négligé. Then, extinguishing the lights and opening the blinds, she sat in one of the comfortable chairs before a window, and lighted a cigarette. Egoists colour the whole world with their own mood, atrabilious or dolent, cheerful or gay; when the world does not respond to this mood a discord results. The Countess was experiencing a discord. This then was the Maple Valley she had come to for comfort and consolation, a succession of lonely suppers with her austere sister, a series of euchre-parties and receptions. There

would be, she surmised, drives up and down the Iowa hills, between the fields of corn and, quite possibly, boating parties on the river. There would be conversation with her old friends and, conceivably, new ones. Would these petty diversions be sufficient to cause her to forget her egrimony?

The moon had arisen and now she could see very clearly in the room. From a pocket in her travelling-bag she extracted the leather case in which she carried Tony's photograph. As she opened the case and gazed once more at his face, the tears welled into her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Tony! Tony! She sat quite still for a long time regarding the picture of the handsome youth. One of his little mannerisms came into her mind, his habit of employing his left hand alone in rolling a cigarette. She remembered how one day late in March in some Provençal town they had stood together under a flowering mimosa-tree. She could still recall the fragrance of the yellow flowers, heavy with pollen. And, from the casement of a house nearby, came the song of a young girl:

> O Magali, ma tant amado,
> Mete la têsto au fenestroun:
> Escouto un pau aquesto aubado
> De tambourin e de vioùloun.

For half an hour or so she contemplated this fatal portrait, with its epithumetic suggestion, revolving

many happy scenes from the past in her memory, but, at last, she laid it reverently beneath her pillow, and slipped her length down between the cool, linen sheets. Now the real struggle began.

Why, she was sobbing aloud, isn't there a cure for love? There are cures for tuberculosis, for cancer, for typhoid fever, for smallpox, cures for all the malignant diseases, and after one is cured the body is stronger than ever before, because the tissues are renewed, but for love there is no cure, and love destroys both the body and the soul!

It was three o'clock in the morning before the Countess Nattatorrini was able to fall asleep.

Chapter IV

Although the guests for the reception had been invited to appear at four o'clock, preparations for the event began at dawn, or so it seemed to Ella. Called by Anna at an unreasonable hour, she had dragged herself out of bed to go downstairs to eat breakfast with her sister. She could not remember a single occasion, since she had left Maple Valley, until this morning, when she had shared her breakfast with any one. She found herself, therefore, irritable, without conversation, but Lou made up for this by announcing a running stream of plans and by calling out orders to the hired-girl. Frequently, she ran to the telephone, to give a forgotten instruction to some tradesman, and she had no sooner finished her first cup of coffee than she begged to be excused to go into the kitchen.

The Countess, grateful for this departure, lingered over the bacon and eggs and the steaming, browned buckwheat griddle-cakes, glancing betimes over the local newspaper, the Maple Valley Star. Her eyes wandered, uncaptured, down column after column until, suddenly, they rested on a paragraph headed:

ITALIAN COUNTESS ARRIVES

The Countess Nattatorrini (née Ella Poore), so read the paragraph, arrived in this city yesterday for a visit with her sister, Miss Louise Poore, at her handsome residence on Pleasant Avenue. This is the first visit the Countess has paid to her native city since her marriage to the Count over twenty years ago. Society is all agog and many are the entertainments planned in her honour. The Star says: Welcome Countess to your old home!

The Countess smiled as she laid the paper aside. Then, folding her napkin, as she had observed Lou do before her, she drew it through a wide circular band of silver, marked Ella, which had evidently been preserved throughout the years in expectation of her reappearance. This ritual performed, she rose from the table and walked to the mantelpiece to examine her reflection in the mirror. She was never able to pass a mirror without a glance at herself and frequently she sought one out. This morning, she noted, with a little pang, that a new line had left its furrow on the left side of her mouth and that the wrinkles around her eyes appeared to be myriad. She must sleep in the future; she must not permit herself to lapse into old age simply because she had been jilted. She sighed as she wondered if only those who could depend upon the love of one man for ever might allow themselves to show their age. Was it, she questioned herself, because she was always seeking love, always searching emotion, that she looked as young as she did? But how

hideous she was this morning, without make-up, or with the modicum of make-up she had put on in her half-deference to her sister's wishes! She was, she assured herself, downright ugly this morning. She would look no better than her old friends in Maple Valley and they would exult over this. How old Ella looks! she could hear them say. Well, she would show them. On the instant, she determined to pay no heed to Lou's views in this matter, to disregard them utterly, as she had already disregarded her views in relation to smoking, and this new thought reminded her that she had not yet enjoyed her after-breakfast smoke, the most important cigarette of the day, she believed, as it was her superstition that it acted as a laxative. She lighted a cigarette, and as she began to puff, her brain cleared; she felt more content. The lines, she was sure, would disappear under this indulgence. It was self-denial that created wrinkles. She was a woman to whom self-indulgence was the breath of life; she could not tolerate the idea of denying herself anything.

Recalling now that Lou was in the kitchen, she wondered vaguely if she could help; she would be expected, doubtless, to make herself useful in some capacity or other. As she pushed open the swinging baize door she tried to conceive a concrete idea of what a reception in Maple Valley would be like. She could remember no receptions in her young days. Her imagination, filled, as it was, with memories of

brilliant Parisian entertainments, was of no assistance to her.

The kitchen was spacious and comfortable. There was a great range, which burned coal in the winter, and a gasolene stove for use in the summer; sinks, white tables, white cupboards. A row of wide windows looked out over the garden and lawn. Through them she caught a glimpse of a crescent-shaped bed of day-lilies and bleeding-hearts and, beyond, a clump of peonies shaking their shaggy, impertinent, rose heads. Lou was busy removing shrimps from tins; the cook was preparing mayonnaise dressing; on the back porch Anna was turning the handle of the ice-cream freezer.

Can't I help? the Countess demanded cheerfully.

Lou looked up but did not reply; an expression of horror unmasked her thought. The expression was repeated, echoed, on the face of the cook. Ella was mystified until she suddenly recollected that her cigarette remained between her lips.

Can't I help? she asked again, even more pleasantly than before.

O, we don't want you to work, Lou replied at last. There's nothing you can do.

Nonsense! There must be something.

Lou had an inspiration: There are the flowers. I wonder . . .

Just the thing. I'll cut the flowers.

Get the Countess the shears, Lou directed the cook. She turned back to Ella. We'll want bush-

els, she said. The rooms must be bright with them.

What shall I bring in?

Everything there is! Pick until you are tired. Anna will do the rest.

Grasping the scissors and a proffered basket, the Countess made her way out. Lou and Mary, the cook, noted with horror that the cigarette still rested between her lips. It was a bright June day, not too warm. Fleecy clouds speckled the iris sky. The birds were singing. As she strolled to the rose-garden abutting upon the barn, Ella began to feel almost happy. Discarding her cigarette, now burning uncomfortably close to the tip, she clipped the yellow tea-roses, the magenta roses on their long stalks, and the pink ramblers growing on a trellis. Occasionally, she hesitated to gaze across the green lawn where the robins hopped saucily about, now pecking the turf, now, with the long, wriggling angle-worms in their beaks, flying away towards some unseen nest. A cardinal made a scarlet spot in one of the oak-trees, and a Baltimore oriole shot a shaft of yellow through the air as he darted from branch to branch. Underneath the trees on the lawn, a sleek tabby cat appeared to be sleeping on his belly, but occasionally he exhibited certain signs which indicated that he was biding his time for a utilitarian spring.

The Countess bore her basket, brimming with roses, into the house and returned to clip peonies,

coreopsis, and sweet-peas, white, violet, salmon, deep purple, and striated. Now she cut pinks and verbenas, phlox, pansies, and nasturtiums. How good it was to be among these nice old-fashioned flowers again. She recalled how she and Tony had once stopped the carriage to gather blossoms from the red cliffs overhanging the Mediterranean, and almost as quickly she tried to blot this memory from her mind. A shadow passed across her face as she sensed another omen of evil: three crows, blue-black as ravens, with raucous caws, sailed high over her head and disappeared.

Aren't you tired? Lou, now beating up the whites of eggs for an angel-cake, called out from the window.

Not a bit, Ella replied, but tell me when you have enough.

O, we can use every flower in the garden, but Anna can finish cutting them when you are tired.

That afternoon when Ella, dressed in a becoming gown of ecru muslin, a half-dozen gleaming stars and butterflies and leaves and insects decorating her ample bosom, great ivory-white pearls in her ears, descended the stairs, she discovered to what use the flowers had been put. They obscured the rooms, most of them disposed in cut-glass vases and pitchers, on tables, bookcases, mantelpieces, wherever there was a flat surface; a few of the larger vessels, banked high with blossoms and sword-ferns, stood

in the fireplaces. The usual chairs had been augmented by a score of folding camp-chairs, rented for the occasion, and backed up against the walls; they even stood in front of the bookcases.

That's where we'll receive, Lou explained, pointing to the double-doorway between the parlour and the dining-room, which had been festooned with loops of smilax.

How pretty it all is! Ella approved. It looks as if there were to be a wedding.

The Countess regarded her sister. Lou was wearing a white poplin dress, with mutton-legged sleeves, tight from the elbow to the wrist, and a wide skirt which began to flare a little below the squeezing waist-band, an indigo ribbon fastened with a silver buckle. She had combed her hair more carefully than usual and it showed the traces of the use of the curling-iron, a quantity of frizzes masking the brow, just like the Princess of Wales, Ella thought. Then she appraised Lou's unpowdered face, the sallow, dead, sexless skin, the narrow, querulous lips, the weak nose, the watery eyes.

Not long after, the guests began to arrive. The still apronless Anna ushered them in. The first-comer was Miss Darrell, Maple Valley's exclusive dress-maker. Lou had explained to the Countess that in a small town one must invite everybody.

That Miss Darrell's dress was not a good advertisement for her talents as a couturière was Ella's first impression. In the first place, it was a winter

dress, black satin, trimmed with an inordinate amount of passementerie, and cut in a sort of parody of a style which the Countess dimly remembered had been in vogue in Paris two or three seasons earlier. Over her fluffy, brown hair Miss Darrell wore a small, black bonnet, on which a single pink rose appeared to be decidedly uncomfortable. Miss Darrell was quite plump, and her face was jolly. She wore white cotton gloves, and she lifted her train with her left hand as she entered the room.

How do you do, Countess, were her first words. I'm sure we're glad to welcome you. How do you like Maple Valley?

It's just as nice as ever, the Countess replied.

O, nicer. There've been so many changes. Have you seen the new water-works?

Not yet.

And we're going to have a new depot.

That's splendid.

And a new High School.

What improvements!

Yes, we're going right along. There ain't a city of its size in the state that's so enterprising. I spent a week in Cedar Rapids recently—I have customers there—and you'd be surprised to see how much faster Maple Valley's getting along.

Miss Darrell was interrupted in this pleasant flow of encomiums for her native metropolis by the arrival of Mrs. Barnes and her daughter Clara. Mrs. Barnes was a tall, thin woman with a gush-

ing manner; Clara, a girl of sixteen or seventeen.

I'm so glad to meet you, Countess, Clara said before her mother had a chance to say anything. I'm sure you've heard Nordica and Eames and all the others. I'm to be a grand opera singer myself.

I . . . the Countess began, but she perceived that no reply was demanded or expected as Clara continued: I've been studying with Professor Hendricks. He's done all he can for me. I'm his star pupil; in fact, I'm the only girl in Maple Valley who can sing at all. He says he has nothing more to teach me, and so I'm going to Chicago to study in the fall.

My daughter has really a remarkable voice, Mrs. Barnes now found opportunity to interpolate.

I should be delighted to hear her sing, the Countess put in.

O, you will! You will! Mrs. Barnes cried with delight. When I heard you were coming, the first thing I said to my husband was that you *must* hear Clara. Mr. Barnes wants to talk to you about Clara. You see he won't entirely take my word for it. He thinks I'm prejudiced because I was a singer myself once and . . .

I'm a soprano, Clara interrupted, and I suppose I've done as well here as I could, but I'll have to wait until I get to Chicago before I can go ahead and really begin to prepare for my career in grand opera.

I suppose, the Countess suggested, you'll go to Paris to finish off.

There! Did you hear that, mama? Clara demanded. Did you hear that? The Countess thinks that for any one of my ability there's no use wasting time in Chicago. I've said that all along. Paris is the place, isn't it, Countess, to study for grand opera?

Almost all the great singers have studied there.

There, mama, did you hear that?

Mrs. Barnes's face assumed a perplexed and worried air. She had not foreseen so complete a plan. It pleased her to boast about her daughter's voice, even to talk about her studying in Chicago, but Paris . . . !

I don't like to think of our little girl going to Paris so soon, she objected. Paris is, well, isn't it rather . . . well, ahem?

A little, perhaps, the Countess replied, smiling, but you might go with her.

I don't believe, Mrs. Barnes responded with some alarm, that Mr. Barnes would hear of it, Clara and me going away at the same time. He's a home body, and he likes his folks.

Folk, mama.

Folk. Yes, Mr. Barnes has a great affection for his folk.

Ella, Lou put an end to this, here is Effie Manning.

Effie!

Ella! and then, I'm Mrs. Chase now, you know. Three children, Ella.

How splendid, Effie!

After they had embraced they took each other in. Ella found it difficult to reconcile her memory of the pretty Effie Manning of the late seventies with this stubby, short-waisted woman, whose bodice sagged above the top of her corset, whose skirt was hitched up in front, and whose back formed a curve which with that of her bosom almost completed a perfect sphere. She wore a white taffeta dress with wide, black stripes, which gave her the appearance of an eccentrically painted barrel.

Well, Ella, how do you like Maple Valley?

The Countess noted that even Effie's manner of speech had changed, the result, possibly, of ill-fitting teeth-plates.

Just as much as ever, she replied.

But there are so many improvements! Have you seen the new water-works?

I arrived only last night, Effie. I've had so little time . . .

That's so, and you must see the new High School —O, that's not built yet, but it's planned. We're very proud of our little city. Of course, it's not as big as Paris yet, but it's newer. I must drive you around. I can't think, Ella, she went on, how you could stay in Europe during the World's Fair. It was *wonderful!* Of course, I've never been to the old country, but everybody says that there's

nothing like the Court of Honour over there, not even the Taj Mahal or the Pyramids. It was *beautiful.* Do you remember—she turned to Lou, who nodded assent—the Court of Honour when it was illuminated at night, all the fountains running? And now it's gone, destroyed by fire.

I'm so sorry, rejoined the Countess. I might have stopped off in Chicago on the way back.

It's too late, but I hope the new depot will be built before you go. You're going to make us a *good, long* visit, aren't you, Ella? I want to give a kettle-drum for you.

How do you do, Mrs. Sinclair, Lou was saying. I want you to meet my sister, the Countess Nattatorrini.

I'm delighted to meet you, smiled the Countess.

This is Mrs. *Dr.* Sinclair, Lou explained.

And I'm pleased to meet you, rejoined the timid, little woman. How do you like Maple Valley?

O, so much!

Hasn't it improved since your day . . . I mean since you were here last? Mrs. Sinclair, flushing, hopelessly hurried on. Have you seen the new water-works?

Not yet, said the Countess. I've only been here since yesterday. I'm planning to see them the first thing tomorrow morning.

Why, Ella, Lou expostulated, we're going out to the old farm tomorrow.

Well, then, the next day. Surely the next day.

Miss Jelliffe, the society reporter for the Star, was the next guest to be presented. She wore a freshly laundered skirt of stiff, starched duck, a pink shirt-waist with a high collar, and a broad linen Ascot tie, pinned with a gold horseshoe. On her yellow hair, streaked with white, was balanced a wide straw sailor. Miss Jelliffe was fading, but it was always said of her that once she had been a beauty. Her first symptoms of decay had unfortunately synchronized with her father's financial failure. He had been a wholesale grain merchant, but a year or two of bad crops had ruined him. Nevertheless, the family still held a high social position in the community.

Did you see the little write-up I gave you in the Star? was Miss Jelliffe's initial question.

It was the first item I saw in the paper, the Countess truthfully replied.

Removing a small pad of paper and a pencil from her bag, Miss Jelliffe demanded, How do you like Maple Valley?

I love it, the Countess responded.

Scribbling away, Miss Jelliffe continued, Don't you find many improvements? The water-works, the projected depot, the High School. . . . There is to be brick paving, at least on Main Street and Oakdale Avenue. The reporter ruefully recollected the cedar-block roads in great need of repair.

I wouldn't have known the place, was the Countess's tactful answer.

Miss Jelliffe scribbled away. Now groups of two and three together began to surge into the room: Mrs. Hughes, wife of the Universalist minister, Mrs. Munger, wife of a prominent attorney, Mrs. George S. Collins, wife of the rich grain and hog merchant, Alfreda Mitchell, who, during the winter months, taught Maple Valley children the waltz, the two-step, and the schottische, all the plain and fancy dances, Katie Pearl, who taught china-painting, Mrs. Atkinson, and her two daughters, Gladys and Doris, the Atkinson twins, the Misses Spencer, whose father had been in the lumber business and whose death had left these orphan spinsters well-provided for, Mrs. Monroe, who, it was said, was writing a novel, and of whom this had been said for fifteen years; moreover, it was true; Mrs. Judge Porter, Miss Hurok, the Bohemian banker's daughter, Mabel Crandall, daughter of the Episcopalian Rector, and a great many more.

At a quarter of six, Mrs. Townsend, the acknowledged leader of Maple Valley society, accompanied by her sister, Mrs. Wiltbank, arrived. She was an extremely tall woman, towering over her companion, with a beak-like nose, shaggy eyebrows, and a well-defined, black moustache. She was fashionably attired in a gown of navy blue foulard with a satin bolero jacket, a costume which the Countess decided at once must have been purchased in Chicago.

Dear Ella, she said, kissing the Countess, how long it has been! How could you stay away so long?

I've grown so used to Paris, Mayme, the Countess explained.

I know, I know. Paris is charming. The Louvre is magnificent, but, after all, there's no place like home, and in all my travels I've never found a town of its size to compare with Maple Valley. The improvements . . .

I must see the water-works! Ella cried desperately.

And you'll stay until the new depot is built and the brick paving is laid. We've quite a lot of improvements projected. We have a very progressive mayor now and the Ladies' Aid Society and the Ladies' Home Study Club do a great deal for the city. We could do more if women could vote.

There I am not with you, intercepted Miss Darrell, who had been standing near with the hope that eventually she might force an opening in the conversation; I believe woman's place to be the home.

After this very daring attack on Mrs. Townsend, the dressmaker recoiled perceptibly.

Indeed, Miss Darrell! Mrs. Townsend adjusted her lorgnette and stared at the intruder.

The room now appeared to the Countess to be a sort of bedlam. It did not seem to her that she had ever before heard so many people chattering

at once together in such disagreeable, twangy voices. The scene reminded her of a rogue elephant stampede of which once she had been an involuntary witness in India. She had quite lost count of the number of people to whom she was being presented; she could recall no names. Automatically she held herself ready to make some pleasant remark concerning the water-works. She was even contemplating the possibility of flight when Lou brought forward a woman with a fine, high forehead, green, intellectual eyes, a rather faded skin (how awful, Ella reflected, women looked without make-up!) and brown hair, neatly and simply arranged. She wore a rather threadbare, brown checked suit, and a brown sailor. This was Lennie Colman, who taught English literature in the Maple Valley High School.

It's such a great pleasure to meet you, Countess, she said. There are so many questions I want to ask you about Europe.

But Maple Valley is making such headway.

O, I know. In the direction of water-works.

And the new High School . . .

I'll have to teach in it.

And the depot? The Countess was smiling.

I never have money enough to go away.

And the new brick pavement?

I haven't a carriage.

Leaning forward, the Countess patted Lennie

Colman's shoulder. She spoke in a low but fervent tone: Come to see me some day soon, dear. I want to talk with *you.*

At this point, a great deal of excitement rose near the door, while a sudden hush made the corners of the room conspicuous. Every face turned to stare at a newcomer.

Who is it? the Countess whisperingly demanded of her sister.

It's poor Mrs. Cameron. . . . I *had* to ask her, but I hope . . . Lou turned very red, held her hand to her mouth, and whispered very audibly in Ella's ear: She takes drugs!

Mrs. Cameron was truly a curious spectacle. She was dressed in a flowing tea-gown of rose challis with a long train. From top to bottom this creation was hung with enormous bows of pale green ribbon, with floating ends. Her hair was untidily arranged and she wore no hat. Her eyes were her most prominent feature: great, steel-grey eyes that pierced any object or person on whom she focused them. She approached the Countess, and during the preamble of introductions, shook hands with her.

I hate gloves, she explained, detest them, but I always wear a glove on my right hand when I go to receptions, because I hate moist hands more than I do gloves, and I hate dry ones more than moist ones.

No suitable reply occurring to her, the Countess

preserved silence. Mrs. Cameron was not nonplussed. Are you, she demanded severely, reading The Martian?

The Martian? the Countess repeated interrogatively.

Du Maurier's new novel. It's running in Harper's.

Ah! yes. I remember. I looked over an instalment last night. I haven't really started to *read* it yet but I'm going to because there's so much French in it.

Too much French, Mrs. Cameron snapped, far, far too much French. Don't read it. I can't tell you how it's disappointed me after Trilby.

You think . . . ?

I do. Don't read it. Read Soldiers of Fortune. Ah! that book has passion. A little naughty, perhaps, but vital. What a hero Robert Clay is, a man of nerve and muscle? Are you acquainted with the works of Davis?

Davis? The Countess looked blank.

Richard Harding. Richard Harding Davis. What a refined writer! Yet he writes with passion, too. Have you read Phroso?

Is that by Davis?

Mrs. Cameron's glance was withering. Phroso? No, that's by Anthony Hope. Ah! Mrs. Munger. Mrs. Cameron turned to greet her friend.

She's bright as a dollar, such a good mind, Lou explained. It's really a dreadful pity. You see,

it was the pain. She was so ill that they gave her morphia. She's never been able to resist it since.

She seems all right, said the Countess.

O, she is all right, quite all right, dear—Lou was flustered—but a little queer . . . her dress, and all that, but quite all right. *Quite.* Lou patted her sister on the shoulder.

At six o'clock a lap-supper was served. The ladies sat in straight rows on the chairs ranged round the walls, while Anna and Mary, the cook, passed circular tin trays, one for each guest. An embroidered doily covered the centre of each tray, on which reposed a Haviland china plate piled with shrimps submerged in mayonnaise, a devilled ham sandwich, a fork, a napkin, and a glass of water. There was a good deal of sprightly conversation while the guests were partaking of this repast, particularly in the corner where Miss Darrell, Mrs. Sinclair, and Miss Jelliffe were sitting.

Seems to me, muttered Miss Darrell, under her breath, that she has surprisingly little to say.

One would think, said Mrs. Sinclair, that she had lived in Maple Valley all her life. She talked of nothing else.

It would seem, Miss Jelliffe put in, that a lady who had spent so many years abroad—she must be fifty, at least—would have more to say about the monuments. Do you remember when Mrs. Townsend returned how interesting she was about the Louvre and Trafalgar Square? She gave that

talk to the Ladies' Home Study Club and mentioned the name of nearly every painter who is represented in the Louvre. I don't see how she remembered them all!

I was looking for more style, too, Miss Darrell continued. She isn't a bit fin de seekle. That's just a simple, summer dress.

Did you notice her slippers? Mrs. Sinclair queried, in her tremulous, timid voice, *long pointed* slippers like dudes wear here. I must say I prefer American fashions. I think we do about as well in Maple Valley, everything considered, as they do anywhere in the world.

Miss Darrell beamed at this indirect compliment. I get all the fashion-books the world over, she asserted, and *compare* them, and then I select the best details, but my dresses are all *original.* No two alike. No lady that I dress can ever say that she has seen any one else wearing the same model. She might look from—she waved her chubby arms, a fork in one hand, in a vague gesture suggesting infinite space—Paris to Chicago and never would she see the same model.

You really do marvels, continued Mrs. Sinclair. When I was in Chicago last winter I saw nothing so fin de siècle as the dress you made for me last year to wear at the McEvoy wedding. Do you remember my blue satin trimmed with forget-me-nots?

Do I remember? Miss Jelliffe was almost in-

dignant. I described that dress to the last ribbon in the Star.

The two servants were now distributing strawberry ice-cream, angel-cake, coffee in large cups, with cream and sugar, salted almonds in pink crêpe-paper-baskets, and olives in cut-glass bowls.

Mayme Townsend was talking intimately to Lou Poore.

She musn't do that here. You've got to tell her to stop it, she said.

Lou was apologetic, trembling. I did tell her, Mayme. She says she won't stop.

I don't know what's gotten into her. She should know better. She's *got* to stop. I'll tell her so myself. If she doesn't she'll be talked about all over town.

I don't believe it'll do any good, moaned Lou. She says she looks like a fright without it.

What difference can it make to a woman of her age *how* she looks, just so she looks natural?

Mrs. Barnes was also conversing very earnestly with her neighbour on the adjoining camp-chair. To think, she said, that Mrs. Townsend should bring her sister here, right under Mrs. Sinclair's nose. Some people have no sensitiveness, no pride.

May be she doesn't know, her neighbour suggested.

Know? Of course she knows! Everybody knows. Why, the doctor drives over there every day, and you can't say that Sarah Wiltbank looks sick.

The Countess, seated between Lennie Colman and Effie Chase, was eating her ice-cream, as silent as might be. Occasionally she smiled.

May I ask, Lennie queried, why you are smiling?

The Countess leaned towards the school-teacher confidentially. Do you know, my dear, she said, I feel like telling you a secret.

Do. What is it?

I've determined never to go near the water-works!

In the columns of the Star the next morning Miss Jelliffe gave a spirited account of this entertainment, but a week later she entirely outdid herself. It will be as well, perhaps, to reproduce her complete report:

'Tis, indeed, a good thing to come back home if every one should meet such a welcome as the Countess Nattatorrini (née Ella Poore) of Paris, France, says this much-missed noble matron who has been away from our midst for twenty long years, and who is back for the first time since her departure. Why, do you know, Louise Poore, her sister and hostess, says she only takes breakfast with her, her days being filled up with luncheons, teas, lap-suppers, euchre-parties, picnics, and kettle-drums, and still some of her friends, old and new, are disappointed at not being able to make a date with her and enjoy her company, for the simple reason that the days are not long enough for more to be crowded in. Beginning with the reception and lap-supper at her sister's residence last Friday (fully described in Saturday's Star) there has been a succession and

round of entertainments, culminating yesterday in Mrs. George Chase's cinch-party to which were invited all the members of the Ladies' Home Study Club and their husbands, who enjoyed a fine game of cards and met the Countess, who is exceedingly democratic, at the same time.

Mrs. Chase's elegant mansion on Oakdale Avenue was gaily decorated for the occasion. The front parlour was abloom with pink sweet-peas, while the prevailing colour scheme in the sitting-room was red, although a few white flowers made a pleasing contrast. Cards were played at little tables. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Townsend won the first prize, a dainty cut-glass spoon-holder, and the booby prize, a set of tennis balls, went to Mr. and Mrs. Rollo Barnes. After the game was over an elegant repast was served on these same little tables, consisting of chicken sandwiches, vanilla ice-cream and sunshine-cake, and coffee with cream and sugar. Individual, cute, blue paper-baskets stuffed with salted almonds were beside each plate.

After supper Miss Clara Barnes, the talented daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rollo Barnes, who has been taking vocal lessons of Professor Hendricks of this city and who is soon to go to Chicago to continue her studies for grand opera, rendered a vocal solo, Good-bye summer, by Sig. Tosti.

The Countess Nattatorrini wore a dress of sheer, pink organdie, cut square at the neck, and her jewels were the centre of a great deal of interest and attention. In her ears she wore her famous pearls, which perhaps once graced the ears of a Hindu princess, and on her breast was pinned a large diamond and ruby butterfly, sparkling with all the hues of the rainbow. This butterfly, we have been given to understand, was the gift of the Infanta Eulalia, sister of the late King of Spain and a warm personal friend of the Countess.

We wonder if we are betraying a secret when we tell of a gala entertainment that is being planned for the Countess early in July? If so, we apologize, but we cannot resist speaking of it. We refer to the monstrous welcome which is to be celebrated in Hall's Opera House when the Countess will be greeted by all her old town's-folk and she will hear and see a brilliant bevy of our best local talent.

Chapter V

Gareth Johns had just completed his final year at High School, where he had been something more than Lennie Colman's favourite pupil. He had been a sympathetic companion as well. Many times, after school was over in the afternoon, he had sat beside her desk talking with her; many times during the past four years he had called at her house in the evening. He had loaned her books from his private library and, after she had read them, they had discussed them together, not always agreeing, to be sure, but with whom else, Lennie asked herself, could she talk about such books as Jude the Obscure at all? She recalled the time that he had secured, with some difficulty, the copy of Lippincott's for July, 1890, which contained Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, and the strange excitement that had been their common feeling, following its perusal. They had believed that there was something clandestine in their intimacy over this book, that here was certainly a matter that demanded secrecy, but after, inadvertently, at least one of them had mentioned it casually in conversation with others only to discover that apparently no one in Maple Valley had ever heard of the book or

its author, some of the pleasure evaporated from their presumed peccancy. They bent over numbers of Stone and Kimball's new Chap-Book, sitting side by side, Gareth particularly attracted by some sketches by an unknown writer named Max Beerbohm, because, as Gareth quickly ascertained, this Max was a brother of Beerbohm Tree and had visited America in his company, Lennie finding more pleasure in Henry James's novel, What Maisie Knew, which was still running in these pages. Almost all their mutual conversation concerned itself with literature and the drama; there were sides to Gareth's nature, depths, she sometimes sensed, Lennie was quite aware, with which she was unfamiliar. He was, she knew, making a collection of the eggs of native birds, and when, a day or so earlier, he had informed her that he was going up the river to search for the eggs of the bank swallow, she had asked him if she might accompany him. To this suggestion he had offered no objection, had, indeed, greeted it with enthusiasm.

Lennie Colman lived on Marshall Street, a thoroughfare running parallel with the railroad tracks, a block or two above them. Gareth's home was farther uptown, and it was arranged that he should call for her on a certain afternoon, about one o'clock, that is immediately following Maple Valley's traditional dinner hour.

It was a very hot day, even for Iowa; the sun was bright; there were no clouds in the sky, when Gareth

strolled up the two steps to the low porch of the old wooden house where Lennie lived with her mother and father. The heat was so excessive that Gareth did not wear a coat, but a belt rather than suspenders held his trousers in place over his slender hips. He carried a tin box with a handle, a box packed with cotton, in which he might deposit such eggs as he discovered. Lennie appeared at the door almost as soon as Gareth had rung the bell. She, too, was dressed as coolly as possible, in a blue and white linen frock. To protect her face from the sun she wore a wide, flapping, straw garden hat, spattered with red poppies. Incongruously, with this costume, in deference to the nature of their projected excursion, she had donned heavy, high walking-boots.

I thought perhaps, Gareth said, that you wouldn't want to come along; it's so hot.

O, I don't mind the heat, Lennie replied. If one is out in it, it isn't half so bad as it is in the house. All the morning I've been working inside helping mother with the housework, and roasting.

They started out, this queerly matched pair, brought together by the paucity of selection offered either of them, walking slowly, turning, at the corner, down Leclair Avenue, passing, unaware, the Temple of the Parcæ, crossing the tracks and traversing the business section of the town. As during the hour of the siesta in an Italian village, the streets were practically deserted; a few empty bug-

gies, their horses strapped to iron rings in stone hitching-posts, stood by the kerbs; occasionally a shop-keeper scanned the vacant street anxiously from his doorway.

A curious fact about Iowa towns of this period was that they had no suburbs; nor did the business district straggle. It was built compactly, and one left it almost directly to come upon the factories of the industries which, added to the corn-belt in which Maple Valley centred, made the place an important provincial metropolis. Lennie and Gareth marched between the great grain elevators, towering to the sky, between the factories, where a little later, furnaces would flare, machines throb, great wheels turn, and leather belts, like fantastic giant ribbons, would exploit this energy. Now all was still. Behind these they passed through the railroad-yards, with switchman's tower, repair-shops, round-house, the home of otiose locomotives, and huge turn-table, by means of which an engine might be made to go or come. Directly beyond, they entered upon the river road, just by the corner of an old mill, whose wheel, fed by the expanse of water created by a dam, incessantly revolved, causing the corn-flour to be ground out. Below the dam, the intense heat had almost dried up the river. A fairly broad stream of deep water ran down one side of the naked bed, near the bank, and streamlets trickled here and there, but most of the bed lay dry and baking under

the burning rays of the sun. Above the dam, however, the river was full from bank to bank, a broad sheet of water, across which pleasant, wooded hills, dotted here and there with wind-mills, siloes, and farmhouses, presented themselves against the turquoise dome of the sky. The near bank was shaded by maples and willows, while the other side of the winding, dusty road was occupied by small farms with modest market-gardens, fields of cabbages, musk-melons, beets, and turnips. The doorways and yards of the cottages where the gardeners lived were in great disorder; rusting implements, stray laths and boards, disused wheel-barrows, lay about on the samel, cracked clay. Here and there on rotting steps, beneath blistered doors, a mongrel pup or a mangy cat slumbered, while chickens and geese wandered about disconsolate and unfed. Sometimes, a few sun-flowers raised their warlike shields above their browning stalks and, occasionally, morning-glories, purple, pink, and white, clambered bravely towards the cottage roofs. A few birds were abroad: blue-birds, resembling nothing quite so much as miniature aldermen, perched on telegraph wires; meadowlarks now and again swept down from the sky; the procacious chirrup of the chickadee sounded; and, in the distance, the melancholy calling of the mourning dove mingled harmoniously with the soft lowing of unseen cattle and the monotonous drone of the cicada.

Since they had left the town behind they had been walking in silence, broken first by Lennie: I love this road.

So do I, Gareth conceded. Nobody ever paints or writes about Iowa. Why not, do you suppose?

Why don't you do that, Gareth? A wistful note, not inherent in the phrase itself, obtruded itself into Lennie's query.

O, I can't write yet . . . at least not like a regular author. I try to, but I always destroy what I have written. You have made me see what there is in literature, set some kind of standard for me. I'm afraid it's too high for me to reach.

You're very young, Gareth. You've got lots of time.

Of course, I'm young, he replied, but it doesn't make it any better to be young when I'm so self-critical. I find more fault with what I have done than a critic would, at any rate a critic who took into consideration my age and inexperience. But that doesn't make things any better. Probably as I grow older and my writing improves I'll become still more critical. Will there ever come a time, do you think, when I won't just have to tear things up?

O, Gareth, of course, there will. Lennie spoke with some heat. You'll write splendidly some day. Some of your themes . . .

They were all rotten. I was reading some of

them over the other day. I know now what's the matter with them, too; I was always writing about things I didn't know about.

That's the way all writers begin, I'm sure, Lennie tried to convince him. You were aspiring to know about those things.

I want to know everything, *everything,* Gareth repeated, and, he went on, I'm going to. When I do, then, perhaps, I can write about Iowa.

You're going to college, Gareth. You'll learn a good deal there.

That's a beginning. He hesitated for a moment. I did expect to go to college, he continued. I've always planned to go. I want to go. Mother wants me to go, but you know father. He's dead set against it, calls it a waste of time. He can't see it at all.

O, it's horrid of him! A boy like you! It isn't as though he couldn't afford it.

It isn't the money. He has a horror of any kind of education. Thinks it's a waste of time; thinks boys should go to work when they get through the grade schools, or even sooner. He wouldn't have let me go through High School if he'd had his way. Mother just *made* him let me. She may make him let me do this, but I'm tired of arguing. Besides, I don't care much any more.

O, Gareth, don't say that! Don't admit it, even if you feel that way. You're the one boy in Maple Valley who deserves a good education.

I'll get *that,* Gareth muttered. I'll get a good education, but I'm no longer so sure that you need to go to college for that.

You don't mean to say that you're going into business with your father?

No, I don't mean that. I won't do that. His face was the sign of his determination.

Why, what do you mean, Gareth?

Look at that red bird, Miss Colman. It's a cardinal. The boy pointed to the branch of a tree.

Isn't it beautiful!

It's like a tropical bird. There are so many of these brilliantly coloured birds that live in Iowa during the summer. I wonder where they all come from?

They migrate, Miss Colman replied, yet she must have known that he had not asked the question for information.

Yes, Gareth replied, an expression of intense ecstasy flashing across his countenance, they migrate. That's why I love birds.

They had now gone beyond the farm-gardens, and were passing through a wooded copse. The path was narrower and shaded from the sun. The ground, on either side, was carpeted with moss, through which great ferns had thrust their fronds. A mottled toad hopped over a beech-tree root, a gnarled protruberance across the footway.

If you go away, Lennie began, her glance directed on the path ahead of her, whether it is to college

. . . or anywhere else, I shall hate to have you go, Gareth. You know there aren't many people to talk to here.

I'll miss you too, Miss Colman, the boy responded.

For the remainder of their walk through the copse they remained silent. Presently, the grove fell behind them; they had come out into the open almost by the bank of the river, while a red, clay cliff, rising sheer for fifty feet, masked the other side of the world from their eyes. The cliff was dotted here and there with holes, into which the grey and white swallows, skimming gaily back and forth over the water, occasionally disappeared, dextrously folding their long, pointed wings.

Is this the place? Miss Colman demanded.

Yes. You sit down now, if we can find a clean, dry spot. You must be tired. While you are resting I'll look for a nest.

The trunk of a great tree, cut off smoothly two feet from the ground, formed an ideal seat. It stood in the shadow of an oak, the branches of which shaded Miss Colman from the direct rays of the sun. Now Gareth, digging his fingers and toes into convenient notches, began to scale the cliff. Frequently, he stopped to examine one of the swallow-dwellings. Little birds, he would call down, or else, Nothing here. Too late or too early. . . . And, at last, in considerable excitement, I've got 'em. He drew an egg out of a hole, depositing it

meticulously in his cotton-lined, tin box, the handle of which he was carrying between his teeth; then one, two, three, four more. As Gareth descended the cliff even more carefully and slowly with his burden than he had made the ascent, the mother bird, not making a sound, sailed round and round his head, as near as she dared approach.

Gee, but I'm dirty. He stood before Miss Colman, ruefully surveying his clothes, soiled with clay. . . . But I got the eggs.

You didn't take them all, did you? You left one for the mother bird?

Yes, I took them all. It's a clutch.

What's a clutch?

All the eggs in one nest.

But why do you want a clutch?

So that I can compare them and see how much they are alike, and how much they are different. Also, to show how many eggs there are in a setting. Of course, he added, the number varies.

It doesn't seem right to take them all.

O, there are lots of them. Look at the flock of birds.

But the mother . . .

These are only eggs. If they were young birds, that'd be different.

Let me see them, Miss Colman suggested. Her face was very pale.

Gareth opened the box, and held it before her. She touched the tiny, white shells, in colour scarcely

distinguishable from the cotton, with the tips of her long, slender fingers. They were still warm.

Poor, little mother bird, she murmured.

O, that's all right, Gareth asserted cheerfully, and then, abruptly changing the subject, he asked, Miss Colman, what college would you advise me to go to, if I could go?

I don't know what to tell you, Gareth. There are so many good colleges. Chicago is the nearest . . . of the big ones.

I don't know that I want to be *near*. I want to get away from this town. I do want to go to a city, though, not another small town. I'm tired of small places. I want to visit the theatre and the opera and the art galleries. I want to meet people. I want to learn. Somewhere, there must be more people like me, heaps of 'em.

She was silent for a moment, digging her clumsy boot into the clay. When, at last, she spoke, her tone was rather resigned than bitter: You'll forget your old friends.

I won't forget you, Miss Colman. You've certainly been dandy to me.

You'll forget everybody.

He did not appear to have heard this. He stood looking out over the water, whistling softly to himself the trio from The Stars and Stripes For ever. Quite suddenly he ceased, and flung himself on the ground. I can't get any dirtier than I am already, he explained. Then another

swift transition: Have you met Lou Poore's sister?

The Countess Nattatorrini? she asked, falteringly.

Yes. I didn't know she had any other sister.

I met her . . . I met her at her sister's reception, the day after she arrived.

I wish I could meet her, Gareth continued. I'd like to listen to her talk about Paris. I suppose she's seen Sarah Bernhardt.

Of course, she must have.

And she probably knows some of the modern French authors. I'll bet she has a lot to talk about.

The day I met her she was talking about Maple Valley. Lennie, who did not feel like smiling, recalling the conversation, smiled in spite of herself.

Answering the questions of the natives, I suppose, Gareth said. I know! Don't I just know! How do you like Maple Valley? Have you seen the new water-works? Mother had a cousin from Chicago visiting her awhile back and she got that all the time she was here.

Again the wistful expression stole over Lennie Colman's face.

You're awfully clever, Gareth, was all she found to say.

He was silent again for a moment, his eyes directed straight upward towards the leafy branches, before he went on: I wonder if I can meet her?

Who?

Why Lou Poore's sister, of course. He spoke a trifle impatiently.

O, you'll meet her. She's going to be here indefinitely. You know, she added, inconsequentially, they're giving a gala entertainment for her at the opera house.

I know. I want to go to that. The Countess aside, I'd go to anything to get into that opera house, and during the summer we don't have anything but ten-twenty-thirty shows and mighty few of those.

There were good things here last winter.

He was scornful: Della Fox and Emily Bancker and Roland Reed. Not much like what they have in Chicago. I want to see Richard Mansfield and Ada Rehan, and Mrs. Fiske in Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

You'll see everything there!

You bet I will, Miss Colman. That's one of the reasons I want to go.

Do you think it will be Chicago?

I don't know, he replied vaguely. Then looking directly at her, he persisted, I wish I could meet the Countess.

Perhaps . . . Lennie Colman was hesitant, apologetic. Her face was pale and her fingers twitched nervously . . . at the entertainment at the opera house . . . I might possibly . . . She gained control of herself and pressed forward: As

a matter of fact we got on very well. Why was Lennie's heart beating so violently? Why was she hesitating to offer Gareth an introduction to the Countess? These were the questions she was asking herself.

O, would you? Gareth showed his delight.

I might . . . I will try . . . It might be possible to take you to her box for a moment.

That would be dandy of you, Miss Colman. I was wondering if I might ask you to do that.

I'll be glad to. Her tone belied her words. She felt chill on this hot day.

And now Gareth again changed the subject. They chattered on, mostly about books, for an hour or so, and the sun was low, a ball of fire behind the hills across the river in the west, when they started back. Realizing the lateness of the hour, the school-teacher became alarmed.

I must reach home before six, she urged.

It's after that now, said Gareth.

Neither of them was wearing a watch.

O, it can't be. I must get back before six. Lennie was impatient, almost petulant.

They strode forward rapidly and, for the greater part of the way, silently. Where the road crossed the tracks Gareth suggested that they might save time walking the ties; in this manner they could cut a good quarter of a mile from the distance to be traversed. While they were still a half-mile from town they encountered a tramp, a ragged, dirty,

fellow, with a tangled beard, bloodshot eyes, and a yellow complexion. He leered at them horribly.

Lady, he said, gimme the price of a meal. Or p'raps your gen'leman friend . . . ? He doffed his greasy cap.

I haven't . . . Miss Colman began with embarrassment and some fear.

We haven't any money with us, Gareth explained honestly.

What's in that tin? The tramp's tone was a mixture of exaggerated politeness and irony, verging on a snarl. Can't you gimme a sandwich? You go out in the woods for a quiet feed with your lady friend an' you can't spare a bite for a poor man what wants work.

They're only eggs in the tin, Gareth muttered.

Gimme an egg!

Swallows' eggs.

So you an' your lady friend's been out for swallows' eggs! Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! The tramp began to grin broadly.

Gareth and Lennie Colman hastened on. As they turned a corner and saw the round-house ahead of them, the woman cast a glance back over her shoulder. There stood the tramp, still leering at them, in the middle of the track on just the spot where they had left him.

What a dreadful man! gasped Lennie. O! I shouldn't be out so late!

It isn't late, argued Gareth, and you said nothing

about being in a hurry until just before we started back. He spoke with some heat.

I know! I know! Miss Colman adopted a propitiatory tone. It's my fault, and it was exceedingly good of you, Gareth, to take me with you. But try to understand, Gareth. It is getting dark. I shouldn't like to meet . . .

O, well, I guess we'll get back in time for supper, Miss Colman, the boy remarked indifferently.

Chapter VI

It had been a horrid afternoon, Lennie Colman admitted to herself in her little bedroom, as she hurriedly removed her dress, divested herself of her heavy walking-boots, poured water from a pitcher into a bowl, and prepared to get ready for supper. There was an ache in the back of her mind; her body was exhausted. She had become prey to an unpleasant excitement. A confusion of emotions had devastated her nerves. Lennie Colman was intelligent enough always to try to be frank with herself. She tried now; wiping her wet face with a towel, she made an attempt to set her house in order. Was it, she asked herself, because Gareth had threatened to go away that she felt so mean, so unimportant? She was obliged to face the fact that he had spoken about this possibility before; they had, indeed, often discussed his chances of going to college and, while she always knew that she would miss him, there was no hurt connected with the pain of her sweet emotion. No, this could not be the cause of her feeling; she must search further. Bravely she dragged the truth from its lair in her subconsciousness: she hated the idea of Gareth meeting the Countess Nattatorrini, and the prospect of

this meeting had dominated the afternoon's conversation. It was, she now quite fully realized, the paramount plan in Gareth's mind. Lennie was certain that this new association, if it developed, and she could see no reason to believe that it would not develop even supposing she withdrew her proffer to arrange an introduction, would glow with a glamour that her own relationship with Gareth had fatally lacked. The Countess could give him everything that the school-teacher had been unable to give him. She could offer him the experiences of her life in the great world; she could draw on an effulgent background for the materials of her interest. Lennie Colman faced the truth, took stock, and knew that she was jealous.

The school-teacher looked around her, dissected the elements of her environment as she had never dissected them before. She saw the room she was living in, the room she had lived in for so many years, in all its sordid commonplaceness. She saw the faded pink walls, from which in spots the paper was peeling, exposing the grey plaster. She saw the pathos of the Copley prints, the Countess Potocka and The Pot of Basil, neatly passe-partouted. She saw the ugliness, the vicious poverty, of the threadbare, ingrain carpet, the cheap, cherry, machine-carved bed, the dresser, with a hand-towel serving as a cover, on which were laid out her celluloid comb, her brush with a blue celluloid back, the blue celluloid box for hair which came out in the

combing. She saw the tasselled dance-cards, pathetically few, yellowing with age, which hung from the standard which supported the mirror over her dresser. She saw the wash-stand with its cracked bowl and pitcher. She saw the black tin plate that covered the hole in the wall into which the stove-pipe was inserted in winter. She turned to her bookcase and saw the row of Cambridge poets: Whittier, Tennyson, Browning, Byron, Pope, Wordsworth. There was one volume, the eighth, of a set of books called Mind. There were text-books, a hated reminder of the treadmill she would be forced to walk until the end of her days, and a few of the classic and semi-classic authors: Henry Esmond and Diana of the Crossways side by side with a set of Shakespeare and a translation of Œdipus Rex. She reviewed, in this dismal mood, the titles of the more modern books: Mark Twain's Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, Henry James's The Spoils of Poynton, More Songs from Vagabondia by Bliss Carman and Richard Hovey, Barrie's Sentimental Tommy, William Dean Howells's The Landlord at Lion's Head, James Lane Allen's The Choir Invisible, and Robert Hichens's Flames. On her little writing-desk, on top of her papers, lay a recent copy of the Atlantic Monthly in which she had been reading a new instalment of Paul Leicester Ford's The Story of an Untold Love. Over her desk hung a china plaque which she herself had painted with grapes and roses

and bees and butterflies. She recalled, with shame, how last summer she had taken lessons in china-painting in Katie Pearl's class, in a vague but futile effort to be something more than she was, and how, after three months, she had suddenly awakened to the fact that she had no talent for the arts. At that very instant the smell of turpentine had begun to nauseate her. And now Lennie Colman understood why she had never called on the Countess Nattatorrini. Several times she had been on the point of making this call; plainly the Countess had wanted her to come; there had been nothing perfunctory in her insistent invitation. Yet she had not gone. Now she understood why; it was because she hated the Countess. She was her rival, her rival with superior advantages.

All the confusion of her thinking, all the mingled feelings of the past four years had suddenly fused during this summer afternoon into an understandable emotion: she was jealous. It had required Gareth's careful casualness in mentioning the Countess, his quiet persistence in begging an introduction, to bring to Lennie some comprehension of the state of her own mind. Four years ago when Gareth had entered the High School she had known him but slightly. Very gradually a kind of sympathetic intimacy had developed between the two. Almost immediately she had become aware that here was an unusual person, the sort of person she had never before encountered in her limited environment. By

her poverty and a real lack of initiative, perhaps, also by a lack of sufficient ability, she was circumscribed by the four walls of Maple Valley, invisible walls, but just as enclosing and excluding as the walls of China. Here, then, was a mere boy, a student in her classes, with a mind sufficiently mature, an appreciation sufficiently keen, a point of view sufficiently sophisticated, so that she could seriously discuss books and plays and music with him. Gareth had given Lennie Colman something she had long ago relinquished hope of finding, and which, assuredly, she could never hope to find again in this provincial community where so many people were old because the young went away as soon as possible to carve out their lives elsewhere. Every year she had watched the best ones depart a few months after they had graduated from High School.

In the past, Lennie realized, she must have meant a good deal to Gareth, too. He must have been grateful for this opportunity for sympathetic intercourse, a benevolent affiliation that no one else in Maple Valley could offer him. But now that she had probed into the hidden chambers of her soul, now that she realized and even admitted proudly to herself that she loved the boy, she could not fail to see that whatever feeling he had for her must be of an entirely different nature. To him she had only been a good friend, some one with whom he might discuss books and kindred impersonal subjects. Now, with the new horizon opened to him

by college life, or by the possibility of friendly consociation with the Countess Nattatorrini, Lennie foresaw how little she herself would matter to him any more. The fact was, she summed it up, that hitherto she had been the only available fountain of interest for Gareth. Now, there were others. . . .

She combed her long, brown hair, regarding herself in the mirror. She was plain, she was forty, she was poor. It was strange that the first time it had come to her that she was really in love with Gareth, desired, even, to marry him, desired above all else to marry him, was also the day that she had become confirmed in the belief that he did not love her, that in any case he would never marry her. Another poignant objection rushed into her mind: her father. No, the Johns would never permit such a marriage, even if Gareth . . . She stopped herself, to add ruthlessly: Gareth least of all.

Swiftly she bound her hair in a knot at the back of her head. Then she drew on a blue dimity housedress. At last she was ready to join her family at the evening meal. Her mother had not yet called her to supper. Supper, therefore, could not be ready, although it was unbelievably late. As she slowly descended the stairs an odious suspicion entered her mind. Standing in the small, brown, low-ceilinged sitting-room, a horror of a room, with two frightful paintings of her mother's father and mother, rocking-chairs, a couch with a knitted afghan, a table with a lamp, an album of World's

Fair views, and a pressed-glass holder harbouring souvenir spoons, she had a new realization of the hopelessness of her plight. On the horse-hair couch with its stuffing sagging beneath, prone and awkward, in a position which suggested that he was an old, worn-out doll, constructed for some sinister reason by a grinning god, and now thrown aside as insufficient even for the purpose of creating more ironic mirth in a cynical world, lay her father. In this first view she understood, fully and completely, that everything was smashed: ideals, hopes, even any further attempt at living in moderate comfort. She was not strong enough to fight.

Father . . . Her tone was dull and even. There was no rage in her voice, hardly an element of grief, not even a suggestion of reproof . . . You've been drinking again.

I'm no good, Lennie. The old man turned over, disclosing his bloodshot eyes, his matted, yellow-grey beard, his food- and drink-stained clothing. I know I'm no good, he whined.

Father, it's so hard for all of us. I work so hard for our money. . . .

I know. I don't do anything. I'm no good, no good at all. I drink up my hard-working daughter's salary, and I don't support my family. Wish I'd never been born. Ought've killed myself long ago. The old man groaned.

Father, dear! Lennie tried to soothe him.

Then, in despair, yet with a certain kind of resig-

nation, she went on into the kitchen where she found her mother creaming dried-beef, boiling potatoes, chopping up a bowl of greens. Mrs. Colman was about sixty-five years old. She had led a hard life and her body had exacted the penalty. Her back was bent, her fingers knotted at the joints. Her face, had it attained a kind of Buddhistic calm, might have been called handsome, for her features were even, her blue eyes kind, under her soft white hair, parted in the centre and smoothed in two curves over her brow, but there were lines of care around these eyes and constant worry had sunk them low in their sockets.

Mother, Lennie began, father's been drinking again.

I know he has. Mrs. Colman was cutting bread.

Where did he get the money?

He got it charged.

I thought we'd told everybody. I thought that was settled. Lennie was breathless, indignant.

There's a new saloon on Main Street where they didn't know. There'll be ten dollars or so to pay. You know he always treats everybody.

Lennie moaned. Well, she said, I can do without a new hat this fall.

Mrs. Colman sighed. He's your father, Lennie. You must remember that. . . . Mrs. Colman wiped her perspiring face with her apron. He's had bad luck. He hasn't been able to get work for so long.

It's very humiliating for a man. You must make allowances.

Lennie, who had heard these arguments before, was not listening. Presently, she began to cry. Mother, I just can't bear it, she sobbed.

Mrs. Colman made no futile effort to comfort her daughter. Removing the creamed chipped-beef from the stove, she poured the mess into a cracked, white vegetable dish. She dried the potatoes. Then she carried the chopped greens into the dining-room and put them on the table.

A moment later, seated at this table, she and Lennie tried to eat. Lennie had stopped crying, but there was no further conversation between the two. From the sitting-room drifted the sound of a running monologue, now soft, now loud, now high, now low, now whining, now groaning. Mr. Colman was enjoying a fine frenzy of self-reproachful hysteria.

I wish I'd never been born, he moaned. My daughter's 'shamed o' me an' my wife's 'shamed o' me. Haven't anything to live for. Can't get work an' have to live on what poor, dear daughter makes, my daughter 't I love with my heart's blood. I'll kill myself, that's what I'll do: I'll kill myself. Then everybody'll be better off. Then everybody'll be happy. Then nobody'll be bothered with an ol' man any more. That'll be shlution of everything. I'll kill myself. I'll take poison or hang myself or

drown myself in the river or throw myself under a train. I'll kill myself. That'll make my wife an' daughter happy that are 'shamed o' me an' rightfully. What can I expect? I deserve what I get. I'm weak an' worthless an' old. I don't mean anything to any one any more.

At this point Mr. Colman broke down and sobbed for a long time. At last, quite suddenly, he fell asleep, and began to snore loudly.

Neither Lennie nor her mother had made any attempt to interrupt his monologue. They had heard all of it too often before. They knew at precisely what point he would begin to cry, at what instant he would fall asleep. Although neither of them was hungry they went on with their business of eating. But it seemed to Lennie, having helped clean the supper-dishes, and, for the hundredth time assisted in undressing her father and getting him to bed—it seemed to Lennie, now back in her own room, that there was no more hope left in life, no hint of pleasure, no faint adumbration of happiness. She was, indeed, far too despondent to cry any more, and she lay in bed, tired in body and mind, her dry eyes wide open.

Chapter VII

Gareth Johns lived on Oakdale Avenue in a large, frame house, which had been erected about 1890 in the best provincial style of that period, and at present was painted a dull buff, with green blinds. This house was set well back on a lawn which sloped down towards the cement side-walk. Following a design of the town two small rectangular parks separated the side-walk from the kerb. These were divided by a walk which ran from the porch, straight across the public side-walk, to the street. In these parks, which recurred in front of every house on Oakdale Avenue and all the other streets and avenues in Maple Valley, trees had been set out at regular intervals. The trees on this particular avenue were for the most part box-elders and cottonwoods, the first of which, a little later in the season, would litter the lawns with a myriad of seeds, about the size and appearance of grasshoppers, the second of which would whiten the ground with cotton-filament. On the lawn itself grew lilac and syringa bushes, which had done their blooming a month earlier. On either side of the house was a flower-bed in the shape of a crescent. One of these was a bed of coleus, harmoniously mottled plants, the leaves shading

from green to scarlet, from grey to mauve. In the other bed, orange and vermilion cannas, castor-oil beans, and elephant ears, a precisely named vegetation, flourished. A circular spray, attached to a long hose, which crawled from a hydrant near the front porch, played somewhere on this lawn nearly all day, and one day a week, Mr. Arlington, an aged Negro, worked lazily with lawn-mower and sickle, cutting the grass. Robins, blue-birds, and yellow warblers hopped about on the turf, or settled in the trees and bushes, chirping cheerfully, and, in their passage from branch to grass, flashing their vivid plumage in the sunlight. Occasionally a hummingbird darted into the cup of a canna, while the trunk of a dead tree, shorn of its branches, was surmounted by a miniature house which furnished a dwelling-place for a family of wrens.

At the rear of the house, approached by a gravel driveway, stood a large, wooden barn, which at present had fallen into disuse, at least insofar as regarded the purpose of its construction. After a runaway, in which to be sure, no one had been hurt, Gareth's father determined to have nothing more to do with horses. He had, accordingly, sold the mare and discharged the hired-man, and now the barn was employed as a receptacle for tool-chests, boxes of discarded household goods, unstable furniture, carious mattresses, rakes, hoes, ice-cream freezers, and other articles which, when no longer of utility, are always given or thrown away in the city where

there is no place to stow them, but which in the country are carefully preserved until the owner dies. On the rough pine inner walls of this barn it had been the pleasure of a former coachman to paste posters of bygone circuses, theatrical show-bills, portraits of race-horses and prize-fighters. There were lithographs of Louise Montague, Forepaugh's $25,000 beauty, James O'Neill exclaiming, The World is Mine! Frank Mayo as Davy Crockett, Janauschek as Meg Merrilies, Minnie Maddern in Fogg's Ferry, Emma Abbott as Yum Yum (a rôle affording her so few vocal opportunities that she had added to them the Lullaby from Erminie), the Hanlon Brothers in Le Voyage en Suisse, Rhea as Josephine, Empress of the French, Maggie Mitchell in The Little Maverick, Helena Modjeska as Rosalind, Maud S., John L. Sullivan, and many others.

Some years back, Gareth had annexed the hayloft for his own purposes. For a time, while the young people of his neighbourhood still interested him, it had been the scene of "shows," wild west and otherwise, to which the infant sisters of the performers had paid pins or pennies as entrance fee to assist as spectators while Chet Porter, the son of a local judge, chinned himself or hung by his calves from the bar of a trapeze. Occasionally, too, it had been the privilege of these fortunate juveniles to witness Bill Munger in a cage with a bear-rug carefully pinned about him. These earlier

pleasures soon ceasing to divert him, Gareth had transformed the loft into a kind of studio-museum where he might assemble and gloat over his collected treasures. Held to belong exclusively to him, no housemaid was ever permitted to invade this garret in the barn. A few of Gareth's friends had been invited to ascend to it, and his mother had frequently been a guest there, but such dusting and sweeping as were done at all were done by Gareth himself.

On the wall he had hung a few magazine posters by Archie Gunn, Maxfield Parrish, and Edward Penfield. There were lithographs by Frederic Remington, and half-tones of wash- and pen-drawings by Thure de Thulstrup, A. B. Wenzell, and Charles Dana Gibson, illustrations for stories, which Gareth had clipped from periodicals. The few articles of furniture, a black-walnut desk, the chairs, a bookcase, and a couch, Gareth had discovered on the floor below, and repaired sufficiently so that they might be useful.

The room represented several eras in Gareth's collecting activities: the era of postage-stamps, the era of cigarette-pictures, and the era of birds'-eggs. Whether because he was of a sentimental or a cynical turn of mind, and it will presently be made apparent that he was paradoxically something of both, it had been Gareth's whim not to change too much from month to month the aspect of this chamber, notwithstanding the fact that he fully sensed that

most of these objects were makeshift kickshaws. His present passion was for books and the crowded shelves of the oak case with its glass doors testified to his interest in this regard, but the cigarette-pictures and postage-stamps, accumulations of an earlier day, reminded him of space and distance and foreign climes. It was still pleasant, occasionally, to turn the leaves of his old book, to examine the orange sun of Japan, the dragon of China, or the eagle of Germany, and wonder how soon he would be able to visit these places. The cigarette-pictures and the coloured cardboards given away with Newsboy plug tobacco, which he had paid for in the shop of a small local fruit and tobacco merchant at the rate of five cents a card until he possessed nearly the entire collection (he owned at least ninety-three out of a possible hundred) were now arranged in neat rows around the walls or, tied in orderly bundles, reposed in a drawer of his desk. These were the days of tights and although it is certain that some actresses of the period wore dresses, the manufacturers of the delectable plugs and of Sweet Caporal cigarettes apparently held a theory that chewers and smokers would, in the long run, find unsheathed limbs more satisfactory to contemplate than skirts. There were portraits of Della Fox, with her own peculiar curl, as Mataya, Crown Prince of Siam, in Wang, saucy Marie Tempest in The Fencing Master, Cissie Fitzgerald, with her celebrated wink, lift-

ing her skirts and one foot galleryward, Camille d'Arville, Saharet and Otero and Cléo de Mérode, recent rages at Koster and Bial's in NewYork, Lulu Glaser in The Merry Monarch, Marie Jansen in The Oolah, Pauline Hall, Virginia Earle, Edna Wallace Hopper in El Capitan, Mrs. James Brown Potter, Julia Marlowe as Juliet, Georgia Cayvan, Lillian Russell in The Little Duke, Virginia Harned as Trilby, Adele Ritchie in The Algerian, Madge Lessing, Maurice Barrymore, Nat Goodwin, Blanche Walsh, Ada Rehan in Much Ado, Caroline Miskel Hoyt, Jessie Bartlett Davis, Lily Langtry: these were a few of the names. Some of these stage-folk (as many of them as had visited Maple Valley during his theatre-going days, which extended back for ten years) Gareth had seen; he knew all about the others through reading the Chicago papers and certain New York theatrical periodicals for which he subscribed.

He had become interested in birds and their eggs later than most boys. He delighted in the colours of the birds, and marvelled constantly at their wanderings. They flew, so he had read in books, to the great plains of South America, and he reminded himself that he could do what a bird could do. He liked the clusters of eggs, too, lying in their cabinet, embedded in the soft cotton. They were his jewels; they satisfied his æsthetic sense. Long moments he would spend bending over them, gazing with rare pleasure at the greenish-blue eggs, spotted with

reddish-brown, of the rose-breasted grosbeak, the mottled grey eggs of the bronzed grackle, the white eggs of the red-headed woodpecker, the brown eggs, spotted with olive, of the blue jay, the pinkish white eggs of the house wren, the reddish-brown and purple speckled eggs of the meadowlark, the greenish-blue eggs, stippled with brown, of the scarlet tanager. He had devoted many hours to the cleaning of these eggs, preparing them for preservation, with the aid of blow-pipe, file, scissors, tweezers, and hooks. Sometimes the embryo would be partially formed and it would be necessary to remove the contents bit by bit through the tiny hole he had filed in the brittle shell. More than anything else he had enjoyed the days of search, the rambles through the woods and fields, days when he was usually entirely alone, dreaming of all the things he had to dream about.

Gareth possessed many books but only a few of them were favourites which he read again and again. This special list included: Daudet's Sapho and Maupassant's Bel-Ami, in translation, Henry Blake Fuller's Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani, and Frank Norris's McTeague. From Fuller's book he had learned to muse on Italy; there was something indescribable about the character of McTeague that corresponded with certain elements in his own nature, and as for Georges Duroy, he adored his career, and he read and reread the description of the seduction of Mme. Walter in the church. There

were, of course, many other books: John Gabriel Borkman, in William Archer's translation, recently issued by Stone and Kimball in Chicago; he had bought D'Annunzio's Triumph of Death because Anthony Comstock had succeeded, for a week or two, in stopping the sale of this novel in New York, and he wanted to find out why; The Red Badge of Courage, The Third Violet, Chimmie Fadden, Quo Vadis? The Quest of the Golden Girl, The Descendant, Mrs. Cliff's Yacht: these were a few of the newer titles.

But it was not, after all, through his books that Gareth had learned the most. His books, like his tobacco-pictures and his birds'-eggs offered him another means of escape from the environment which he detested. Quite possibly, however, his imagination was his principal aid in this respect. He possessed a curious gift of divination; he *divined* what he had not experienced. Before he fell asleep at night pictures of faces often formed themselves behind his closed eyelids. Changing expression, rapidly they shifted into other forms. The strange thing was that none of these faces he remembered ever having seen before. Frequently the heads were attired in fantastic foreign head-dresses; often a face and its expression would be so sinister as to suggest that of a murderer; again, one would appear to interpret perfect innocence. He had inherited a power to dream which lent him the ability to create beauty even out of the ugliness which

surrounded him. When he wrote, his fables and vignettes never dealt with the life he was acquainted with; always they were in the nature of a release from it. This side of his nature, it is probable, was due to the Welsh strain in his blood. Henry Johns, his father, was descended from a Welsh family which had settled in Pennsylvania; Gareth was named after his grandfather. His grandmother, however, had been Pennsylvania Dutch, and Gareth's father had derived his character from her. Gareth, too, was beholden to her for the hard, practical side of his curiously blended disposition.

From his father, who was unnaturally reticent especially in regard to questions of sex, Gareth had learned nothing. A weaker character, under these circumstances, turned into the world later to shift for himself, might have sunk in the sea of experience. But Gareth had no intention either of becoming a sciolist or of living without touching life. One definite act, he felt (and the result proved that he was correct in this assumption) would completely release his imagination. Therefore, without taking any obvious initiative himself, without, even, any desire, simply through curiosity, he had, on two occasions, accepted the readily proffered attentions of Clara Barnes. There was nothing sweet about the memory of these moments; rather they had made him harder, more sophisticated. They had, in a sense, been responsible for his oppugnancy towards his

environment, for his present disregard for his former boy friends, healthy, young animals, who played games, smoked cigarettes in private, and boasted, furtively, of certain desirable relationships they had formed with girls in the Bohemian quarter. To himself, Gareth now, quite justifiably, seemed ages older than these untutored savages. They, to be frank, regarded Gareth with even greater disfavour.

He had begun his imaginative understanding of the world even earlier by understanding his father and mother. From a very tender age there had always been a sharp division in his feeling for these two parents. It was through his mother, who sympathized quite blindly with his efforts at mental escape, that he eventually got everything he wanted; wants always opposed at first, and frequently to the end, by his father. He had come to sense at last that his father's course, long established and now habitual, traditional even, a routine that could be depended upon, was, to a large extent, dictated by jealousy, jealousy of Gareth's love for his mother and her love for him. To Mrs. Johns, indeed, Gareth was the whole excuse for God having created the world, and she was not always clever enough to conceal this exaggerated emotion for her son from her husband. As for the boy, he was well aware that his mother was the only human being he had yet met capable of arousing any successful response in him. He did not analyze his love for her; he simply ac-

knowledged it. This was practically the only weakness in his nature.

Mrs. Johns was what is known in a small town as a "bright woman." She belonged to the Ladies' Home Study Club, and read papers on Emerson and and Thoreau when the club occupied itself with American literature, and on the Egyptian pyramids or the wisdom of the Chinese, when the club spent a year in vicarious travelling. She was a good housekeeper. She was liked by her friends, of which she had plenty. In appearance she was slight and rather short. Her dark hair was rapidly turning grey, but she still looked young in spite of the glasses she always wore before her eyes. She was not exactly pretty; it would be said of her that she had a pleasant face.

Gareth's father conducted a wholesale grocery business, in which he was entirely successful. He negotiated his affairs, by the aid of travelling salesmen, throughout the depth and breadth of Iowa. He belonged to the local lodge of Elks and the Knights Templars of the Masons. His great hat with its white plumes, his gold-braided coat, and his sword, hung in the closet of the guest bedchamber, ready for an infrequent parade in honour of the death of some member of the lodge or for some other equally solemn occasion. He was a member of the Maple Valley Board of Trade and a director in one of the local banks. One year, in the interest of better politics, he had been persuaded

to run for alderman, but he had been defeated by the saloon interests and the ring. He was, it may seem unnecessary to add, a Republican and an Episcopalian. Nobody of any social standing in Maple Valley was a Democrat or a Roman Catholic. That fact, however, did not prevent the Catholic Democrats from occasionally gaining control of the local government. There were so few Jews in Maple Valley that the Jewish question had never become a problem. Sam Adler, who ran a clothing emporium, belonged to the Methodist Church and the Elks just like anybody else, while Isaac Goldberg was considered one of the brightest lawyers in the state, and was the life of any party where men played poker around a table spread with bottles of Budweiser and plates of American cheese and crackers.

Henry Johns was a tall, pompous man. He weighed about two hundred and fifty pounds and wore side-whiskers. He was growing bald around the top of his head. A gold watch chain, hung with a walrus-tooth and a Masonic emblem, was always stretched across his expansive belly, while the head of an elk, set with diamonds and rubies, invariably embellished the button-hole of his coat-lapel. When he walked to church on Sunday morning he carried a gold-headed stick and wore a high silk hat and a Prince Albert coat.

Henry Johns had never understood his son. It

may be said, indeed, that he never made the slightest attempt to understand him. No American small-town father ever understands boys like Gareth Johns, boys with imagination and the creative impulse; they are looked upon with vague distrust and suspicion, at best, with a certain condescension. It seems incredible, indeed, to most small-town minds that any boy should not grow up with the ideal of becoming a retail boot and shoe merchant. Gareth, from almost the moment he had begun to talk, had developed uncomfortably unconventional traits which his father had tried to deracinate. These attempts, it may be added, were entirely vain. Gareth's mother, so far as it lay in her power, saw to it that the boy should follow his own interests. They were allies these two, and had many secrets from Johns senior, more every year, as time passed. One of their secrets concerned the room in the barn. Mr. Johns, of course, was aware that Gareth spent a great deal of time in the barn, but he had never climbed the stairs to see how, and, indeed, only thought of the hay-loft, when he thought of it at all, which was seldom, as a sort of play-room for an underdeveloped boy. With Gareth's bed-chamber in the house he could have found no fault. That was entirely devoid of any personal character. Aside from a tennis racket and a mandolin, both of which had long since lost their interest for Gareth, this room was bare of adornment, save for a framed picture or two of a kind which might have

been transferred congruously to any other room in the house.

When Gareth wanted to do something which required money or outside aid of any kind, he went directly to his mother, and between them they usually were able to devise some furtive or clandestine achievement of his plan. When this was impossible, when the character of his desire demanded a conference with the head of the house, sallies and excursions, battles and truces, were always foreseen and studied out in advance so far as was humanly possible. The college project was a case in point, for, obviously, it was unfeasible to carry out such an undertaking without Henry Johns's consent, a consent which, up to this time, had been completely withheld. Mr. Johns had emerged victor in every campaign; he had proved adamant in every encounter; he had been firm in the face of implorings, arguments, tears, and rage. Nothing had as yet moved him, but Mrs. Johns had by no means lifted the siege which now seemed to be pretty much in her hands, as Gareth was incapacitated for further action, partly because he had to a large extent lost interest, and partly because he knew that anything further he might have to say in the matter would merely succeed in making his father more obstinate.

Mr. Johns had definitely determined that his son should embrace a business career, and day after day he insisted that the boy's apprenticeship should begin at once, first as an underclerk in his establish-

ment, with the promise of a travelling salesman's job waiting a few months ahead. This was the present deadlock, but Gareth foresaw victory in the future, assured, perhaps, by the memory that his mother had eventually won in every similar encounter. Only one terrible obstacle, aside from his present indifference, stood between him and the goal. His mother, he knew, was suffering both from heart trouble and a tumorous growth. In a short time, whatever the condition of her heart, Dr. Sinclair had informed her, an operation would be necessary. Under these unfavourable conditions, Gareth could not bear to see her continue to struggle with his boorish father.

It was not his parents alone, however, that Gareth understood; they and his books and his relations with Clara had helped him to understand himself and through himself to understand others, at least as they reacted towards him. He was not vain, or conceited, but he was quite aware that he possessed his fair share of good looks, and a certain magnetism, largely due, he had come to believe, to his congenital indifference (as a child, he remembered, ladies used to stop to pet him on the street, partly, he now fancied, because he had been so bored by these attentions), and that his mind worked at a rate several hundred degrees higher than the town average. Therefore, since the day that he had gone birds'-nesting with Miss Colman, he had sensed the fact that she was in love with him. This, he

knew, quite destroyed any possibility of future intercourse with her. He had liked her in his fashion; she had been useful to him; had given him a great deal in their impersonal discussions, but he knew now that this was the end. Miss Colman was not Clara Barnes. She would always be dreading a complete communion and always desiring it; she might even want to marry him. On the plane of emotion to which her desire might conceivably carry her, future communication with her would be decidedly unpleasant.

In these hours, after he had considered Lennie, his thought invariably drifted forward to the Countess Nattatorrini, whose name associated itself quite naturally in his imagination with all that he felt about the life of Paris. She might even, he reasoned, have met Alphonse Daudet or Guy de Maupassant. She had, he assured himself, seen all the openings in the Paris theatres in the past two decades. What excitement conversation about these matters might provoke! Somehow, however, the longed-for meeting had not come about. His mother had met her several times, but his mother gave few entertainments, and she could scarcely presume—Lou Poore was not one of her intimate friends—to open her house suddenly to this visiting guest. It was, he was beginning to believe more and more, through Lennie Colman that he was ironically destined to be introduced to the Countess Nattatorrini.

Chapter VIII

In spite of the unusual number of social activities which had been arranged in honour of the return of the Countess Nattatorrini, so numerous, indeed, that often practically every hour of her day was engaged, she had not recovered the lost tranquillity which she had come to search. More than once she was on the point of packing her trunks and travelling back to Paris where at least she might conceivably pick up some news of Tony, or to China where there was some faint chance that she might forget him. She wavered, however, unable to make any decision. In the meantime letters began to arrive from abroad which served to remind her of the kind of life she would go back to, if she went back. Lady Adela Beaminster, for instance, wrote glowingly of the predicted splendour of London during the week of the Diamond Jubilee, and a vision of these stupid, solemn rites rose in Ella's mind: Piccadilly crowded with vehicles so that it would be impossible to drive anywhere without standing interminably in line, waiting one's turn, the heavy formality of the English drawing-rooms, the forbidding exclusiveness of the Duchess of Wrexe, so much more forbidding, so much more exclusive than

even the similar atmosphere which permeated the salons of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. From that Faubourg, also, she had received a message, signed by the Princesse de Laumes, couched in excessively polite and evasive phrases, but none the less direct enough in its implications. Some hint of her affair with Tony had apparently become a part of current gossip. The Princesse, as a consequence, did not withdraw her protection, but she wrote of the self-imposed exile as a healing manœuvre, and suggested, quite broadly, considering the general style of the epistle, that it might be indefinitely prolonged with beneficial effect both to the patient and her friends. This letter had made the Countess extremely angry. A letter from the Marquise de Villeparisis, on the other hand, was written in a more impersonal tone. The Marquise had scribbled page after page with details concerning the Grande Semaine and the latest news about the Affaire Dreyfus. The effect of this letter was to make Ella feel as if she herself were a prisoner on the Ile du Diable. It even excited in her a little pity for Dreyfus. She was, however, able to reason that her unhappiness was not to be laid wholly to the account of her physical position in the world. She had suffered as much discontent before and elsewhere as she was now suffering in Maple Valley. Nevertheless, she always came back to the view that the absence of Tony was slowly killing her, and the silly life of this small town, which, in its modest

fashion, might have diverted her before she had met Tony, now almost unduly exhausted her slight amount of patience. There were kettle-drums and euchre-parties, more lap-suppers, picnics in the cool, wooded groves which surrounded the town, and boating-excursions on the river, which the younger set attended, the men, in bright, striped blazers, playing mandolins and singing My darling Clementine or The Spanish Cavalier or My Bonnie lies over the ocean. This last song seemed to have a direct bearing on her own case and always started the tears to her readily welling eyes. She had been taken to the trotting-races, to a basketball game, to a church sociable where the tables were heavy with steaming chicken-pies and juicy strawberry short-cakes. She had played croquet.

One matter completely puzzled her. She had asked, implored would be a more accurate word, Lennie Colman, the only person she had met who had interested her, to call, and Miss Colman had not called. Every time the Countess returned to the house she scanned anxiously the pile of cards on the silver card-receiver in the hall, but as yet she had never found Lennie's card there. Nor had she met Lennie at the various entertainments, smaller and more exclusive than that arranged by her sister, which had been given in her honour. Was it possible the Countess wondered, that the school-teacher was never invited? A discreet query or two removed doubt on this subject. Lennie was

often, it developed, invited. She had pleaded headaches, trumpery indispositions, as her excuse for not appearing. When, at last, the Countess, now altogether baffled, questioned Lou, her sister informed Ella of Lennie's father's weakness, but this did not seem to be a satisfactory explanation.

For the rest, the Countess was listless, often impatient, frequently even irritated. She understood and liked the men she met better than the women. They seemed more natural, more simple, talked to her as if she were one of them, even joked with her. One man in particular, Goldberg, the Jewish lawyer, had made what might be considered advances towards her, but she had been unable to regard these attentions otherwise than in a ludicrous light. With her old friends, Effie Chase in particular, she felt less at ease, less comfortable, than with her new ones. Effie had made her realize the interest the town was really taking in her, in spite of the apparent indifference to anything outside the affairs of Maple Valley which it manifested in her presence. It meant something for Effie, obviously, to have her here. Effie, she perceived, was exploiting her to Effie's own advantage. It was Effie, indeed, who had been responsible for the plan of the gala entertainment in the opera house, now definitely set for an evening early in July. Effie, on this account, had been duly careful not to offend the Countess, not to annoy her by giving her impertinent advice. In spite of her precautions, however, Effie had suc-

ceeded in sufficiently annoying the Countess. Ella was annoyed by Effie's fat, dumpy figure, by her badly fitting corsets, by her false teeth, and by her gushing manner.

Mayme Townsend had annoyed the Countess in a more unforgivable way. Mayme had called the morning after Lou's reception and had warned Ella frankly that the use of cosmetics was almost a cardinal sin in the eyes of these provincials. *You* know and *I* know, Mayme had said, but *they* don't. Aside from her impertinent directness on this occasion, the Countess was amazed at the reservations in Mayme's intimate conversation. Ella contrasted their ostensibly informal talks with the utterly frank gossip of a mixed dinner party in Paris, and she could not resist smiling.

Nevertheless, she saw more of Mayme than she did of any one else, Lou, of course, excepted. There was something about Mayme that she liked. In her own way, Mayme governed society in this small community and it vaguely amused the Countess to watch her do it. Mayme had a delightfully wholesome quality, a great deal of character which it would have needed no moustache to denote, and even a slight sense of humour. She was heartily intolerant, but no more intolerant, it regaled Ella to remember, than the Princesse de Laumes in her own fashion, certainly by no means as intolerant as the Duchess of Wrexe. There was, however, a reasonable codicil to this idea: Mayme's intol-

erance, like most American intolerance, was based on ignorant prejudice, while that of the Princesse and the Duchess was based on an established tradition of behaviour.

The Countess frequently visited the Townsends' great, red brick house on the hill, the interior of which was a curious confusion of several periods, like Rome, for Mayme's children were going to college, and their taste was freely displayed throughout the mansion, without in any way destroying what was left of the taste of two preceding generations. The Rogers groups, the stuffed bird of paradise under its glass bell, the heavy, padded chairs, with their tassels, the massively gold-framed oil-paintings remained, but Puck and Judge lay on the living-room table, a discarded rubber football, which needed blowing up, occupied a corner of the seat in the hat-rack, and here and there on the walls, between steel-engravings after masterpieces by Sir Edwin Landseer, depicting stags at bay and other animal tragedies or canvases representing Cardinals playing chess, or sheiks, embedded in cushions while they smoked hookahs, were pinned brightly coloured supplements from the Chicago Inter-Ocean, lithographs of flower sprays from the brush of Paul de Longpré, Christian martyrs about to suffer death in the arena, and Italian girls drawing water from fountains. It was the present humour of John Townsend, the nineteen year old son, to recite as often as he found an audience:

I never saw a purple cow;
I never hope to see one;
But I can tell you anyhow:
I'd rather see than be one.

Ethel, the daughter, just back from her first year at Wellesley, on the other hand, was wont to demand suddenly: Why is a mouse when it spins? and being denied adequate reply, to answer the riddle herself thus: The higher, the fewer. She also had a fancy for reciting Jabberwocky. Wellesley, it seems, found Alice very smart this year. These terrible young people had taken to themselves the privilege of hailing the Countess as Aunt Ella. Merely to be in their presence made her grow older, and when she called on Mayme she breathed a sigh of relief if she learned that these juvenile monsters were off riding their bicycles, or rowing, or playing tennis.

Mayme Townsend herself was a woman of such strong personality that in a more favourable environment she would have been as outspoken about herself as she was here about others. In Maple Valley she was a social leader; people were afraid of her, but, Ella noted, not without irony, Mayme was afraid of herself too. They all were; that was it. They all were concealing something; skeletons dangled from the hooks in all their closets, skeletons whose every bone was dissected in the town but which the owner never referred to, this being

part of the strange local code. Was she herself, Ella wondered, the skeleton in the Poore closet?

It also became apparent to the Countess almost immediately that, quite apart from the disfavour in which the use of cigarettes by women and make-up were held, there were other things which were not done, things which were taboo. It was difficult enough to be sure just what these things were because nobody ever spoke of them, but they could be sensed, if one were mistaken enough to do them, by the subsequent air of disapproval which swept over a silent room. These mysterious taboos gave a visitor a feeling of self-consciousness, a lack of ease, which increased rather than diminished as time went on. So Ella's lips became paler and paler, not on account of Lou's whining admonitions and prayers or Mayme Townsend's warnings, but rather because of the unspoken (at least before the Countess) disapprobation of the town. Nor was it long before Ella confined her smoking of cigarettes to her own bedroom, setting the time for this dissipation to the hour before retiring. Nor did she descend to breakfast in the morning until she had dispensed with all traces of what, in this alien world, appeared to be deemed a vicious habit.

Lou herself, Ella soon observed, was imbued with the protective coloration of the town. She had begun by speaking, if a little timidly, what was on her mind, making audible, if weak, complaints and suggestions, but now she resorted to injured glances

and a damning silence, which added ten-fold to the discomfiture of the Countess. The relation of a single incident will suffice to show the serious effect that a few weeks' sojourn in Maple Valley had made on her. With Lou, one day, she had been walking through the town, Lou pointing out old landmarks, houses that still remained from Ella's time, retailing the subsequent histories of the occupants, detailing the changes that had taken place. The career of Judge Porter had occupied her tongue for several blocks, when presently, in a side street, they passed a modest shop, flanked by a wooden Indian, where grocery supplies, in tins, and tobacco were sold. In the window was displayed an uncovered box of old-fashioned stick candy, striped pink and white, like barber poles, candy which Ella as a child had loved, and a flood of sentimental memory invaded her mind, causing her to experience a strong desire to enter the place to buy a stick to suck. But, immediately she asked herself, Would it be right? Would it be the thing? Would people understand? She hesitated before the window, and then, not without trepidation, made her decision.

I'm going in, she announced lamely, to buy some candy . . .

A flush of nervous embarrassment spread over Lou's sallow face. She had reached that point where she was careful not to needlessly controvert her sister, but her humiliation in this difficult situation was quite apparent. She furtively scanned the

street up and down to see if any one were observing them (and how could she be certain that no peering pair of eyes was not gazing from between the shutters of the closed blinds of the great house opposite?). However, as the street appeared to be deserted, she followed Ella, with some reluctance, into the shop. She made this sacrifice in vain: her hesitation and alarm had served to spoil the adventure for the Countess. On principle, Ella bought the candy, in defiance of law or custom (in these instances she never could be entirely sure which it was) but when she tasted it she found that it had lost its flavour. A week later the manila paper bag of sweets still stood on the desk in her bedroom and, realizing that the unpublished tenets of Maple Valley were beginning to infect her spirit, the Countess, with a sigh, dropped it, at last, into the waste-basket. She noted that Lou, whose face had preserved an anxious frown during the course of this week, as if she feared a recurrence of this unpleasant unconventionality, grew brighter after she had committed this act of renunciation, and she wondered how many times a day Lou must have stolen into her bedroom to gaze on the little paper bag with silent prayer.

Another incident occurred which, while highly farcical in retrospect, almost caused the Countess in her contemporary temper to evacuate immediately. The Poores had always been Universalists, almost free-thinkers. Seth Poore, as a matter of

fact, had been a great admirer of Robert Ingersoll. As children, neither Ella nor Lou had been compelled to attend church or Sunday school. They had been brought up in an atmosphere of religious freedom conducive to the growth of liberal ideas or, as had really happened, of no ideas on the subject of religion at all. Either of the sisters would have felt outraged or at least offended had she been dubbed an atheist, but neither was by nature devout. Ella, later, when she married, through force of circumstances became a Roman Catholic, while Lou, with the eyes of the town upon her, continued to make sporadic attendances on the Universalist Church, and contributed liberally towards its rather uncertain maintenance and the small salary of the preacher, a tiresome old fellow, who, on all occasions, wore a threadbare, frock coat, disfigured by grease spots.

Within the week an evangelist had come to Maple Valley and was conducting services at the Methodist Episcopal Church. One morning, shortly after his arrival, Mrs. Fred Baker, a spare, meagre woman in a black alpaca dress, her bony shoulders hunched at an uncomfortably ugly angle under a dark-red ice-wool shawl, paid an unexpected visit to the Poores. There were no curves in her face, which was not unlike that of an ancient and disappointed bird, and her eyes were small and watery. Carrying a reticule and a bundle of tracts, she was ushered into the library where Lou was occupied examining house-

hold accounts, preparatory to paying the June bills.

Is the Countess in? Mrs. Baker inquired, after a perfunctory word or two of greeting, in an unpleasantly nasal, sing-song voice, acquired from much singing of anthems, much intoning of psalms, and much listening to a preacher who chanted his sermon whiningly from beginning to end.

Why yes, Mrs. Baker, why yes, she is, Lou responded, puzzled. Do you want me to call her?

I'd like to have you, Mrs. Baker replied, projecting her shoulders and folding her hands smugly over the spot where her stomach would have been, had she not been too much of a scrag to permit of its existence. Her eyes, behind her glasses, watered still more. The rims were red.

Lou went to the hall and called up to Ella, who was sitting in her bedroom staring at a picture of Tony, photographed on a donkey at Avignon before the Palace of the Popes. Presently the Countess joined the ladies in the library.

The two sisters sat gazing rather apprehensively at this austere female. Although she was a near neighbour, she did not participate in the social life of Lou's circle. Mrs. Baker did not play cards or go to picnics. She had never danced since the day she was born. She prayed a good part of the time and she attended every service at the Methodist Episcopal Church and there were many of them.

After a pause, which seemed so interminable to Ella that she had almost made up her mind to re-

ascend the stairs to her bedroom where she might return to her favourite and melancholy habit of contemplating Tony's portrait, Mrs. Baker spoke at last.

Ladies, she began, when I see my duty I carry it out, as is right in the sight of the Lord, no matter how difficult it may be for me, and prayer has convinced me that it is my duty to talk to you.

There followed another pause. Lou and Ella remained silent.

Ladies, you doubtless know that Brother Eldridge, the world-famous evangelist, who has more converts to his credit than any other living man, is at present holding daily and nightly meetings at the Methodist Episcopal Church. I feel that it is my duty to invite you to attend these meetings, to sit at the feet of Brother Eldridge until you are ready and willing to go down on your knees before your God. . . . Mrs. Baker paused to offer a silent prayer to her Maker. . . . Begin by reading these tracts. . . . She passed two slips across to the sisters who received them mechanically. . . . Read them to yourselves, and see if it is not in your hearts that you want to come to God. I believe it is in your hearts. Learn to pray, friends, and to humble yourselves before the Almighty. He is willing to wash away your sins, no matter how deep a stain they may have made, and He will receive you into the fold, if you will stop playing cards and renounce your other vicious practices.

At this point in Mrs. Baker's discourse, the Countess permitted the tract she held in her hand to flutter to the carpet. She rose, not without dignity.

Mrs. Baker, she said (and there was a tone in her voice which would have warned any one who knew her; it did warn Lou), Mrs. Baker, it should be known to you that as an Italian Countess I am a Roman Catholic, and that you, in my eyes, are a heretic.

A papist! exclaimed Mrs. Baker in notes which scaled from B flat to F in the minor mode. A papist! That is much worse than I feared. I thought that you, like your sister, Miss Poore, were a free-thinking Universalist, but a papist! That is terrible. My dear Countess, don't you know that your soul is trembling on the brink of hell? Won't you, before it is too late, come to the arms of Jesus?

The figure of speech was unfortunate. Whenever the Countess considered the idea of going into anybody's arms they were the arms of Tony. She was very angry and she continued to stand.

Mrs. Baker, she said, I think it might be advisable for you to mind your own business!

O, Ella! Lou protested feebly.

I expect to receive insults, Mrs. Baker replied meekly, her voice now preserving the monotone of D. I expect to receive insults, like my good Lord and Master. He was stoned. He was tortured and imprisoned. He was crucified. Should *I* then complain? Place, she suggested, a crown of thorns

on my brow, but repent, repent e'er it is too late!

Ella turned to her sister. If you care to converse with this lunatic, she said, you may do so. I am going back to my room. Without a word more to Mrs. Baker, she left the library.

I fear I have been too hasty, the pious woman whimpered. I fear I have come too early, Miss Poore, but I only meant to do my duty as my Lord has asked me to do it, after I have prayed to Him, begging Him for guidance. You, perhaps . . . timidly, she proffered another tract . . . You, perhaps, will see the light. You have not walked so far along the path of error. You have not become a papist.

I am afraid, Mrs. Baker, Lou said, without much assurance, it must be admitted that I do not consider myself a sinner. There are many ways of being religious. Our opinions seem to differ on that subject and so no good can come of our talking further along this line. My sister . . .

O! your sister! I shall pray for her! A fallen woman! Perhaps a Magdalene! A papist! I shall ask Brother Eldridge to pray for the Countess.

Mrs. Baker! Be careful! Do you know what you are saying? My sister is not a fallen woman.

The visitor rose, gathered her reticule and tracts firmly in her long bony fingers, and prepared to depart.

I have been crowned with thorns, she whined, crowned with thorns, like our dear Lord!

Then, as Lou firmly pressed her towards the door, turning, just before she made her exit, she shot out: Sodom and Gomorrah, your day will come!

Lou watched her as she carefully descended the stone steps and marched slowly down the side-walk until she came to the next house, which she entered. A moment later Ella's face peered down over the banisters from above.

Has she gone? she whispered.

Yes, Lou replied.

Ella descended the stairs. What colossal cheek! she said. The woman must be dotty. Does she do this often?

No, she has never done it before. She has never been inside this house before.

Lou was obviously so much the prey of astonishment that she found speech with difficulty. The Countess, who had begun to consider the incident ridiculous, entered the parlour and sat down before the piano. Running her hands over the keys, she struck the first chords of Chaminade's Scarf Dance. Lou had followed her and stood looking at her across the black polished surface of the Steinway, absent-mindedly rubbing her fingers over the lid in a vain search for dust.

She ought to begin at home, Lou went on. Her husband goes to burlesque shows in Chicago. He was seen with a woman there once, a young girl. He goes down to Davenport . . .

To Davenport? Ella continued to play.

Yes, the river towns are . . . Lou was unable to finish this sentence.

I think I met Fred Baker once . . . somewhere . . . in a store. I was with Effie Chase. Is that . . . ?

Yes.

I liked him. He's all right. He would be all right anywhere else. Burlesque show! Davenport! A girl! The Countess laughed as her fingers moved skilfully over the keys. Don't you think, Lou, that you are a little censorious?

Well, Ella, the woman exasperated me. She called you a fallen woman, a Magdalene, and when her husband goes on like this, I think . . .

The Countess's natural good humour had all returned. Anywhere else, in any *city,* Fred Baker would be considered a virtuous man, high above the average. One girl and a burlesque show! Here he is damned. I wonder the men in this town don't go completely to the devil!

Some of them do. Lou was now highly excited. There's the Bohemian colony in the lower end of town. Some of the men visit girls there. O, I know. I've worked in the home for girls. I've heard their stories. Names have been mentioned. Then others visit the river towns. Some men who are not travelling men by profession go away and stay for days . . .

Lou, said the Countess, the narrow prejudices of

this town, based on a complete ignorance of life, are stifling. They're damned vulgar, that's what they are! Why I heard the other day that a woman was ostracized for getting a divorce! Even religion is mean here. I wonder, she mused, if all America is like this? You'd better look out! You don't know what you're doing to the next generation. They won't stand it; no one with any brains would stand it! They'll revolt! They'll break loose! You'll see. Mark my word, you'll see!

The Countess struck up the Adeste Fideles. Lou stood staring at her, her eyes dilating with horror.

Chapter IX

In 1885, the year of its construction, Hall's Opera House was considered one of the handsomest and most modern edifices in the state of Iowa. So far as opera houses were concerned (and these "opera houses" never harboured any opera companies except that headed by Emma Abbott, or extravaganzas of which Eddie Foy or Frank Daniels was the star, or some unpretentious troupe which offered The Mikado, The Mascot, The Chimes of Normandy, Olivette, The Queen's Lace Handkerchief, Fatinitza, and The Black Hussars at prices scaling from ten to thirty cents, according to location) this boast still remained true as none handsomer or more modern had been erected in the state since that date. Theatres built in the eighties, however, followed a still earlier fashion in playhouse construction. The balconies in Hall's Opera House curved like a horseshoe from the centre of the house to the boxes, ranged in three tiers, one above the other, close to the proscenium arch on either side. On the main floor, the parquet sloped back gradually to the slightly elevated dress-circle, which also ran horseshoe fashion to the boxes, and, with the stage apron, completely enclosed the parquet. The seats on the

main floor were upholstered skimpingly in green plush; the seats in the balcony and nigger heaven were not upholstered at all. These seats made a great deal of noise when they were opened by the ushers.

The walls of this playhouse were hung with green baize, which, in the course of a decade, had faded considerably. The boxes were guarded by gilded plaster Cupids and the faces of the boxes and the railings of the balcony and gallery were adorned with ornate, gilt scroll-work. The ceiling, from which depended a heavy, brass chandelier, tricked out with upright green globes, enclosing gas-burners, and inverted white globes for electrical lighting, was a wild allegorical triumph, depicting angels blowing trumpets to the four points of the compass, floating in a sky of intense blue, spattered with woolly, pink clouds. The foreshortening of these figures was a masterpiece of eccentricity. The painting over the proscenium arch represented the artist's paraphrase of Sacred and Profane Love. Originally, it had been merely a bad copy of Titian's canvas, but after several leading citizens of Maple Valley had witnessed its unveiling, they had unanimously agreed that it was too Latin in spirit to satisfy the refined taste of the inhabitants of the fair state of Iowa, and the artist had been requested to add clothing to the figure of Profanity. Her position in the composition and the advanced stage to which work on

the picture had proceeded, together with the artist's lack of skill, made this compromise a little difficult. The result was, indubitably, chaste, but there were those who might have queried, Was it art? Both the ceiling and the proscenium arch decorations were the labour of an Italian from Chicago, whose life-work up to that time had been the embellishment of saloons. He had been lured to Maple Valley by George S. Collins, who had amassed a vast fortune of over $75,000 through his incontestable talent for selling grain and hogs, and whose wife desired to transform her residence into a royal villa, or at least into something as near to a royal villa as could be managed in that locality at that period.

The drop curtain, painted in Chicago (the owner of the opera house did not seem willing to risk the chance of the Italian ruining a hundred dollars worth of canvas), wore a more professional air. The space in the centre, tastefully overhung by painted, draped, blue curtains, caught back by painted, gold ropes, was occupied by a representation of a picturesque Italian scene, not entirely identifiable, in which were to be discerned, in the background, a smoking volcano, a lake, cypress-trees, and, in the foreground, surmounted by a broken column, a flight of steps, on which a young shepherd lingered, playing his pipes, while a contadina, returning from the fountain bearing a water jar on her head, stopped to listen. This picture was framed on three sides by squares and oblongs con-

taining advertisements of the leading merchants of Maple Valley. The Silverdale Drug Store contributed a drawing of a slightly magnified (in relation to the scale of the objects shown in the Italian tableau) hot-water bottle, with the assurance that this store carried a full line of rubber goods and drugs. The Isham Candy Company required an oblong in which to hint that Isham candies were just the thing for your mother and sweetheart. Newly killed beef only is on sale at the Main Street Market, read another inscription, while the Maple Valley Jewelry Company advertised a fine stock of clocks, watches, brooches, wedding rings, and precious gems of every description.

In this period in American history, few travelling companies visiting one-night stands carried their own scenery, depending, rather, on the theatres to supply their needs. Most of the smaller playhouses made meagre providence in this regard, considering one exterior, a wood or a garden, and two interiors, a palace and a hovel, quite ample to fit the exigencies of any known drama. The stock sets at Hall's Opera House were more numerous. There were two exteriors, both a wood and a garden, and three interiors, besides two sets of sliding flats which joined with dirty seams down the centre directly behind the act-drop: one of which represented a street in a city, with a drinking fountain, over which doves statically hovered, a church with a sky-scraping spire, and two rows of brown-stone houses,

painted in perspective and extending to a dim point in the distance; the other of which exhibited a royal apartment, which resembled a white-tiled Childs restaurant without the tables, hung with red velvet curtains and ornamented with palms growing from blue and gold jardinières. The back scenes were not built as is the custom today. They consisted of succeeding rows of sliding flats working in grooves, the last pair meeting in the centre at the rear of the stage. Borders, representing ceilings or leaves of trees, masked the tops of these flats. The footlights and all the other lighting backstage had been, until within the past few years, gas, but electricity had supplanted this earlier and dimmer illumination.

On Wednesday evening, July 7, 1897, Hall's Opera House had been especially decorated for the gala entertainment in honour of the Countess Ella Nattatorrini. The American and the Italian flags mingled their bunting over the proscenium arch, and smaller banners hid the faces of the boxes. Across the front of the apron, below the footlights, a huge streamer had been stretched, bearing the inscription, emblazoned in red letters:

WELCOME TO OUR COUNTESS

The Ladies' Home Study Club, the Board of Trade, the Young Girls' Kensington Society, the Idle Hour Cinch Club, and the Elks had all contributed towards paying the expenses of the evening, which, with the

rent of the hall, the orchestra, and the decorations, amounted to $163.26. Admission was by invitation only and, although almost everybody of any importance in Maple Valley had been asked, there were many heart-burnings in regard to preferred locations.

The doors were open at 7.30, but long before that hour a group of tough boys, wearing caps and puffing Sweet Caporals stood at one side of the entrance, waiting to get a view of the arrivals, to stare at the stunners, to make audible comments about the overdressed swells. On the other side of the doorway, a little later, John Townsend, Ray Cameron, Chet Porter, and Bill Munger collected. Their conversation ran something like this:

Betcher Corbett could lick Fitzsimmons if they'd fight again.

Betcher he couldn't.

Betcher he could.

What about Tom Sharkey?

He's all right, but he's a light weight. Bill Munger began to whistle Crappy Dan.

One of the earliest arrivals was Miss Darrell, caparisoned in her black satin trimmed with passementerie, which had served as her party dress, summer and winter, for the past three years. Entering, she encountered Miss Jelliffe, who was wearing a rather frayed lace dress she had purchased in Chicago when she attended the World's Fair in 1893. Miss Jelliffe had rubbed an inordinate amount of powder,

several shades lighter than her blotched skin, into her face, and her hands and arms were covered with long, ivory-hued mitts, with holes here and there beyond those provided by the art of the lace-maker. She carried a pad of paper and a pencil.

O, Miss Jelliffe! gurgled Miss Darrell, smoothing out her crumpled skirt. This is to be quite an occasion.

I don't believe Maple Valley has ever seen anything like it, returned the society reporter. Look! There are the Atkinson twins. As Gladys and Doris stopped to giggle and chat with John Townsend and his friends, Miss Jelliffe scribbled rapidly on her pad: G. and D. Pink and blue challis.

The crowd pressed in fast now, arriving for the most part on foot, some descending from horse-cars which stopped at an adjacent crossing, a few driving up in landaus and surreys, a scattering approaching in old-fashioned buggies. There was even one steam-propelled locomobile, driven by George S. Collins.

The majority of the women's costumes ran to light summer hues of organdie, duck, lawn, linen, challis, dimity, percale, suisse, batiste, China silk, muslin, and pongee. Some of the ladies wore little capes in three layers, terminating just above the elbow. Others protected their throats with feather boas, white, pink, yellow, and black. Many necks were enclasped in bands of black velvet, on which musk-melon seeds had been sewn in conventional

designs. The manufacture of these collars was almost, for the season, a local amateur industry. Few of the men wore evening clothes. The greater number were dressed in business suits, but a frock coat or two was to be seen. Chatting gaily, acknowledging acquaintances, and speculating as to the quality of the prospective entertainment, the crowd surged into the theatre. The tough boys on the left of the portal enlivened these entrances and hastened them with such remarks as: Where did you get that hat? Ain't she out o' sight? Ain't she cute? She gets there just the same! There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight! Gee! what a dicer! Get a move on yuh!

Mrs. Porter, a regal personage in her magnificent gown of tan silk, trimmed with ruffles and flounces of old lace, stopped to gather her son in, as she entered. At the same moment Mrs. Cameron, looking a great deal like the popular conception of Ophelia, with marigolds in her loose hair, her great grey eyes fixedly staring, appeared, apparently from nowhere. Ribbons, as usual, were the essential note of her costume. The bow at her belt alone required yards.

Once inside the crowd found the curtain up, and recognized the garden set, so often seen during previous winters in the course of society dramas, but it had been reinforced by the full suite of palace furniture, carved, gilded, and upholstered in red plush. There were four chairs besides the rocking-

chair and the sofa. To these had been added a table, elegantly draped with a scarf, Lou Poore's grand piano, and two spreading palms, set in brown and gilt jardinières, which had been loaned by Mrs. Townsend, who had also sent one of her Axminster rugs, which was large for the largest room in her house, but which was almost lost in the centre of the vast stage.

At eight o'clock the house was full to the last seat. The orchestra, consisting of a piano, two violins, a double-bass, a cornet, and a drummer, filed into the orchestra pit and began to tune up discordantly. Presently, one of the ushers, all young Maple Valley society girls who had volunteered for the occasion, walked down the centre aisle and whispered to the pianist. The pianist tapped for attention, the violinists tucked their instruments under their chins and raised their bows, and the band struck up a ragged rendering of the Garibaldi Hymn. This had been an afterthought on the part of Effie Chase. Only the day before she had telegraphed to Chicago, and the music had arrived on the afternoon of the performance, too late to permit a rehearsal. Every eye in the parquet was now directed towards the back of the house. Headed by Mr. and Mrs. Townsend, the procession, consisting of Lou Poore and the Countess, Effie Chase and her husband, and Mr. and Mrs. Wiltbank, all the gentlemen in correct dress suits, paraded down a side aisle to the right lower box amidst vociferous applause.

The Countess entered the box a little before the others and remained standing, while the entire audience rose and cheered until the orchestra had concluded the anthem. Then everybody sat down.

Look at her! Gareth Johns, sitting beside his mother, whispered. Look at her!

The Countess wore a robe of magenta tulle, a creation of Monsieur Worth. In her canary-yellow waist-band, she had inserted a few sprigs of forget-me-nots, and she carried a canary-yellow fan. The corsage was cut square in front and very low; the sleeves protected the arms to the elbow, ending in ruffled frills. The tattooed emblem on the left forearm, from a distance, bore the appearance of a bruise. The Countess's waved red hair was parted in the centre and was encircled by an amethyst tiara. She wore these semi-precious stones in her ears too, and her breast was ablaze with multi-coloured jewelled insects and flowers. Directly over her heart she had pinned a superb diamond sunburst.

A buzz of excited comment swept through the theatre.

It's very low cut, that dress, Mrs. Sinclair murmured, a trifle apologetically (she was always apologetic in her manner when addressing her husband).

I wish you Maple Valley women wouldn't be so narrow, was the doctor's impatient reply. This was a tacit reference to the physician's frequent trips to Chicago, "in the interests of science," and his wife recognized it as such.

Quite recherché, quite (the Countess had noted some time back how much more a monoglot population employs foreign words than people who speak several languages with ease), was Miss Darrell's comment to her neighbour, but, you know, if I do say so myself, I make dresses that are just as fin de seekle as that, but not quite so extreme, right here in Maple Valley. I don't believe in the extremes of the mode. I get the Paris plates but I choose my models conservatively. She panted from the exertion of so much explanation on this extremely warm evening, and the passementerie spasmodically rose and fell on her satin bosom.

Miss Jelliffe could be observed, like a white lace wraith, rushing down the side aisles to positions of vantage from which she could scan the house. Untiringly, she scribbled names on her pad, following them with reports, in a shorthand she had herself invented and which would have been illegible to another eye, of the gowns worn by each. In the Star the next morning two columns were filled with descriptions of the costumes worn by the ladies. This is a sample: Mrs. Townsend wore a dress of sky-blue and pink taffeta. The skirt was plain and simple, tight in front and at the sides, with gathers and four godets. The corsage was a bolero over a blouse, the latter of cream lace over pink satin. The bolero was of turquoise velvet, made short, trimmed with three rows of velvet piping and with a half chevron of Venetian guipure over pink on

each side. The sleeves were slightly draped in the upper part. The collarette, which stood high under the chin, was of lace. Her sister, Mrs. Wiltbank, wore a dress of wheat-coloured veiling over mauve taffeta. The underskirt was visible at the bottom beneath the indentations of the veiling, and was ornamented with two flounces embroidered with white insertion and edged with a gathering of Valenciennes lace. The taffeta skirt was rounded at the bottom, flat in front, and over the hips above, and had godets behind. The corsage was blouse-shaped and accordion-pleated, and had a yoke of mauve satin, spangled with jet, in the shape of a stole reaching to the waist-band, and was edged with spangled English-point. The neck trimming was fastened behind with the same lace mixed with bows of mauve satin. The waist-band was of mauve satin, cut on the bias and fastened behind with a bow of the same. The sleeves were tight all down and were trimmed with nine rows of Valenciennes insertion over mauve satin in circles, like the trimming of the skirt. The cuffs were trimmed with a lace flounce. The upper part was trimmed with a jockey composed of coques of mauve satin. Miss Jelliffe was very expert at this sort of thing.

The orchestra was scraping and blowing through Sousa's King Cotton March but this did not halt the conversation. The Atkinson twins, Gladys and Doris, were in a giggling mood. Sitting directly behind Gareth, they found it amusing to nudge him

in the back occasionally, the better to give him the benefit of some extra clever sally.

She certainly looks out of sight, commented Gladys.

O, I don't know, Doris corrected her, adding that if people dressed that way in Paris she was glad she lived in Maple Valley. It might at least be all one colour, she went on. That fan certainly clashes with the colour of the dress.

What'd ma say if we wore dresses as low as that? Gladys demanded.

It don't cut no ice what she'd say because we don't want to wear 'em, responded Doris.

O, look at Mrs. Cameron! Those marigolds! Cheap garden flowers!

She ain't the only pebble on the beach! Look at Alfreda Mitchell!

My trilbys hurt; I wish they'd begin.

Lennie Colman, sitting with her mother far in the rear, was silent. She gazed alternately at Gareth and at the Countess. After a full day spent in preserving fruit, Mrs. Colman was so tired that she had almost fallen asleep. Her eyelids drooped and her jaw began to unhinge. Periodically, she would wake up with a start and her features would freeze into a fixed smile. Then she would begin to nod again.

The orchestra having concluded its rendering of the King Cotton March, the entertainment began. The only man music teacher in Maple Valley, Pro-

fessor Hendricks, who gave both piano and vocal lessons, announced to open the program, bowed his acknowledgment to the polite applause that greeted his appearance. He was extremely stout and his evening clothes, made some years before, were too small for him. A line of socks showed between his trousers and his boots and a streak of white waistcoat was visible beneath his coat in front. Professor Hendricks had a ferocious mass of curly, black hair which he never made any effort to comb or train, and fierce black mustachios which would have given him the appearance of a Nick Carter villain had he been more slender. The program announced that he would perform a piano solo, selected. What Professor Hendricks actually did play was The Butterfly, by Calixa Lavallée. Bulging before his instrument, resembling nothing else quite so much as a pinguid bull-frog, the professor began to startle the flights of triplets representing the fluttering of the pretty insect, rather uncertainly at first, but with more assurance and warmth as he proceeded, concluding the number with a scintillating shower of false notes.

A murmur of yet politer applause, but rather less than that which had greeted his entrance, rippled over the house, but Professor Hendricks was not recalled.

Such technique! exclaimed Mrs. Sinclair, who admired the professor's mustachios.

In reply, Dr. Sinclair permitted himself a grunt.

The next number was a skirt dance by Miss Pinkie Dawson, a pupil of Alfreda Mitchell, a fact which would have been apparent to a messenger from Mars had he observed Miss Mitchell's deportment during its performance. Every lift of the voluminous, green cheese-cloth skirt, every elevation of the pointed toe, every bend of the flexible body was reflected in the movements of Miss Mitchell's arm from her distant seat in the parquet.

Miss Pinkie Dawson disposed of, a very much frightened young man bore a casket gingerly to the centre of the stage and deposited it on the table. Among the spectators at this juncture there was a frantic consultation of programs. Miss Clara Barnes, it was discovered, was announced to sing the Jewel Song from Faust, by Mons. Gounod. The second prelude to the appearance of the prodigy was the rushing of Mrs. Barnes from the stage-door behind the boxes on the left side, up the aisle, to the rear of the house, where she stood, palpitating and proud, leaning against the brass rail which enclosed the dress-circle. There was a long pause before the diva made her way forward amidst cheers and the beating of palms. Clara was attired in a short yellow dress of some soft, summer material. It was not cut very much after the fashion of mediæval Nuremberg, but a black leather handbag, suspended from her belt, a cap on her head, and the fact that her hair was plaited in two long braids made it apparent that she intended the

effect to be one of costume. The short skirt exposed her legs which, from knee to ankle, did not seem to vary appreciably in circumference.

The diva made a false entrance, but Professor Hendricks cleverly jumped two bars and caught up with her. It was obvious that she was not singing in English, but for a time, the Countess, perhaps the only person present who could have understood the air in its original tongue, was puzzled to discover what language the girl was emitting. When, at last, the truth dawned on her that Clara was pronouncing French according to English phonetics (Marguerite, ce n'est plus toi, for example, came from Clara's lips as Margareeta, see nest plus toy) she became so interested in trying to follow her that she did not derive the full measure of enjoyment she might otherwise have profited by in watching the gestures and listening to the vocal efforts of this young girl who was so soon to go to Chicago to finish her musical education.

A spectator rather than an auditor might have noted that Clara acted the number with spirit and gusto, if in a quite unique manner. She decked herself with chains of brightly coloured beads ravished from the casket on the table. She fastened her mother's (once her grandmother's) diamond earrings in her ears. She flitted about, from time to time regarding herself with delight in a little oval mirror with a green celluloid back. At

one juncture she almost tripped over the edge of the Axminster rug, and it was a pleasure to observe with what skill she saved herself, averting a ridiculous accident. In the spirited coda, she fairly surpassed even her own record for vitality, dashing about like a hornet, tossing beads and baubles into the air and catching them as they fell, expelling notes, sweet and sour alike, by main force into the auditorium. Maple Valley was justly proud of its juvenile prima donna and, as she concluded Gounod's air, the audience burst into volcanoes and earthquakes of plaudits.

Now! Now! Mrs. Barnes anxiously adjured the ushers at the back of the house.

Giggling and embarrassed, the girls bore stalks of gladioli, bunches of feverfew, candytuft, and purple asters, tied with maiden-hair ferns, and laid them at Clara's feet. Curtseying low, she smiled, and, grasping the hand of Professor Hendricks, led him to the footlights with her. She even condescended to sing an encore in English, I don't want to play in your yard, of which she gave a rendering that was pronounced coy and cute on all sides.

Mrs. Townsend turned to the Countess. Ella, she demanded, what do you think of that girl?

The Countess was guarded in her reply. She never was certain what she was expected to say, and, as she didn't care very much, she tried to please. Very interesting, was all she could think of this time.

She ought to be spanked and put to washing dishes, was Mayme Townsend's rejoinder.

Following Clara's triumph a sanctimonious bass sang Asleep in the deep, and two contraltos chanted Abide with me in nasal thirds. Now came the great event of the evening, the Honourable Judge Porter's address of welcome.

Judge Porter was a pompous personage with a florid face and a bald head. He had a good, strong chin and honest green eyes. His nose was a fine, manly nose. He was considered one of the leading citizens of Maple Valley and once had been nominated for election to the state legislature. He had not been elected, but that fact had no effect on his standing in the community. As a public speaker he was locally regarded as without a peer.

Judge Porter walked to the very edge of the footlights and stood silent, making a long pause before he began his remarks. When at last he spoke, his voice was poised and low; he was saving his power and his wind for later flights of superb oratory. His speech, reported in full in the Maple Valley Star on Thursday morning, July 8, 1897, follows:

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow citizens and citizenesses, *and* our noble visitor (he made a low obeisance towards the royal box), we have with us tonight a former Maple Valley belle who, it may be said, has gone from the pavements of this inconspicuous . . . shouts of No! No! . . . inconspicuous, the judge repeated sternly, but worthy

town of Iowa to the courts of Europe. Many of you here have dandled her as a child on your knees and now she is the favourite of kings and princes. . . . At this point a tremor of emotion, not unlike that produced by pulling out the stop labelled vox humana in a pipe-organ, made itself felt in the speaker's voice.

Friends, the Judge continued, there is a lesson in this, a lesson which the Countess, our noble guest (again he bowed towards the royal box), has come back to teach us. No . . . he held up his hand . . . not with her own lips. She is too modest for that, too sweet, too NOBLE. It is I who am delegated to tell you. I do not mean to say that she has asked me to tell you, but I know what is in her heart, and I feel that it is only just to her to bring this secret out and expose it.

The speaker paused again, a little longer this time, but there was a perfect silence in the auditorium, the silence of expectancy and curiosity presently to be satisfied. The Countess nervously plucked at the feathers in her fan.

There are many young people in this audience, Judge Porter continued, and many of these young people are at present in attendance at the Maple Valley High School. Many of us not so young any longer once attended this institution of learning, but I do not think the High School was built when the Countess, then little Ella Poore, was with us. That was a long time ago, a long, long time ago. I do

not think that Ella Poore, if she will permit me to revert for the moment to the name by which we all knew her then, had the privilege of attending this splendid school. So much the more honour to her for reaching the thrones of kings without this aid; so much the more to her credit. But for you young men and women who have this inestimable prerogative there is no excuse if you do not amount to something in this world. It is not necessary that you should aim to reach the thrones of kings. I am very democratic. I think that a man who does his work in an honest way right here in Maple Valley is just as good as any king that ever lived (wild cheers). Better (wilder cheers).

After another short pause the speaker went on: The Square in front of your institution of learning seems to include all the factors necessary to interest the student in the great world, more keen-eyed, more willing, and more wishing, to drink in the knowledge and experience that may come his way (and I may say right here that this glorious land we live in offers all the opportunity any of us should demand in this respect) than he would be otherwise. We read a good deal about the influence of environment, but always in the small sense of the word, the environment of the home, the environment of good or bad companions. These factors certainly influence our lives for better or for worse, but just how great an influence the environment of the Maple Valley High School has had *and is still*

having has probably never been estimated. I doubt, Judge Porter continued, looking directly at Mrs. Sinclair, who was sitting on the edge of her chair, bending forward, with her right hand behind her ear so that she might not miss a word, I doubt if any one has even ever thought about it before.

First there are the trees growing in the square, the massive oaks, the great elms, the saplings, which suggest nature and natural things to our boys and girls. A love of the beauty of nature is inculcated in their souls, almost imperceptibly, almost without their knowing it.

Could anything be more fortuitous . . . the speaker lingered over this word and repeated it lovingly . . . fortuitous than the location of the railroad depot (and there'll be a new one soon) on one side of the square, with its tracks, which lead eventually, if you follow them far enough, to the four ends of the earth? They suggest to our young men and women that the world is small and that travel is easy. The fountain in the centre of the park might well be construed as the symbol for an ocean voyage. Many a time, strolling through the park on my way to court, I have been struck by the sight of a boy sailing his toy sloop in the basin of the fountain. Doubtless, in just the same way, Noah Webster as a child played with his letter-blocks.

But these are all symbols of an intellectual or a business life. How good it is then to turn to the

three spires of three churches of as many sects of the Christian creed which rise on the side of the square opposite the depot to bring to mind thought of the soul, of its present tendency and its future welfare.

Above all, let us recall the great open spaces of green grass in the square, the lawn, my friends, the LAWN. No pavement to bring to mind a picture of the treading Magdalene, no gin-shop with its sinister significance, no symbol whatever, indeed, that may be construed as unhealthy.

Since these ideas occurred to me some years ago, it has been my interest at various times in various climes to recall them for purposes of comparison. I may truthfully say that it is my pride and gratification to be able to state that no other square which it has been my privilege to visit combines so many fortunate advantages or has been so propitiously arranged for the inspiration and edification of youth. Copley Square in Boston has its library, its art gallery, and its Trinity Church, all excellent in themselves, but without the depot they give the sense of self-sufficiency, of provincialism, I may even say of smugness. And where is the High School? Madison Square in New York, even within the shadow of Dr. Parkhurst's Temple of God, is too worldly. And where is the High School? Leicester Square in London is of the earth earthy, a bawdy place dominated by vaudeville shows and night restaurants. And *where* is the High School? You may thank your Maker, chil-

dren, and the wise members of your board of education that *your* High School is not situated in Leicester Square. The Place de la Concorde in Paris can only suggest to a sensitive boy or girl the spilt blood of a mighty empire, can only remind us of those horrible pictures Thackeray has painted so vividly in A Tale of Two Cities. No, one would not wish any institution of learning to stand in the presence of the obelisk in the centre of that Place.

So, friends and noble visitor, I offer you your High School and its environment as Maple Valley's most beneficent influence, and I call upon the Principal of that school to rise, so that we may say to her in the words of the great poet:

> Grow old along with me;
> The best is yet to be.

The applause after this address was prolonged and hearty. There were cheers for Miss Amidon, the elderly Principal of the Maple Valley High School, as she rose from her seat in the centre of the house. The Countess, although almost hysterical, beat her palms together, but Mayme Townsend frowned and remarked, The Judge is trying to get on the school-board, the old fool!

Following Judge Porter's address an intermission was announced and Gareth took advantage of this moment to leave his seat to join Lennie Colman.

Miss Colman, he adjured her, you promised . . .

Gazing at the handsome lad bending over her,

Lennie assented with a sigh. As they walked down the side aisle to the royal box all eyes were focused on them. Strolling between acts at the opera house in Maple Valley was not customary. When Lennie parted the curtains at the back of the box and the Countess, turning, recognized her, extending a cordial hand, excitement ran high.

Why haven't you been to see me? the Countess demanded.

Miss Colman blushed, as she stammered, I wasn't sure . . . I don't know . . . I've been occupied. . . .

The Countess shook her finger at the schoolteacher.

O, yes, you know. You were sure that I wanted to see you. . . . Well, come now; it isn't too late.

Lennie pushed the business in hand ahead of her confusion. I've brought some one tonight, one of my pupils who wanted to meet you, she said. May I . . . ?

Certainly. Bring him in. The Countess's use of the masculine pronoun was instinctive or clairvoyant.

Miss Colman again parted the curtains and, as Gareth appeared, she introduced him. There was a second's pause: the Countess weighed him, realized his charm, his attractive youth. Then Gareth spoke:

I want so much, he said, to hear you talk about your life in Europe. . . .

It was the turn of the Countess to flush. In pure astonishment her mouth opened and closed several times before she could form words. She blinked her eyes. She even considered pinching herself to see if she were truly awake. For the first time since she had arrived in Maple Valley some one had shown an interest in her.

Chapter X

Later that night, in her own chamber, while the Countess slowly divested herself of Monsieur Worth's creation, she felt strangely elated, exhilarated, exalted. As the bouffant tulle billowed in magenta waves about her feet she caught a glimpse of her happy face in the mirror over the bureau. Affecting Sanderson in Thaïs, she prayed to the glass, O, mon miroir fidèle, dis-moi que je suis toujours belle,—que je serai belle éternellement;—que rien ne flétrira les roses de mes lèvres;—dis-moi que je suis belle et que je serai belle—éternellement! éternellement! Still smiling, she untied the strings of her corsets and removed them. Then, comfortable and silent, she stood in her filmy, ruffled and embroidered under-garments; silent, but not unsentient. A complicated maze of thought possessed her mind, dominated by a figure who awakened every pleasant emotion she was capable of experiencing. In the midst of this tender revery her eye met the photograph of Tony on a donkey which, in its engraved silver frame, was a permanent adornment of her writing-table. Raising the picture in her hand, she gazed at it intently. Not to her surprise, perhaps, certainly not to her disap-

pointment, she discovered that its magic had vanished. No further in the past than that very morning she had been unable to contemplate this trumpery pasteboard without the tears flowing; now she found herself able to regard it with the utmost equanimity, even indifference. She was amused, indeed, now that this sordid adventure had lost whatever esoteric significance it had held for her to this point, to examine the face of this vulgar little cabot in the critical spirit. There was, she learned, nothing fresh about this face, in spite of Tony's youth; a kind of stupid sophistication, the sophistication of a bête paysan, lingered around the eyes; the mouth was soft and sensual, lacking in form or purpose; the nose too small; the ears too large. For the first time, she observed clearly that the boy's clothes were cut in a ridiculous outer-boulevard fashion, and that the pattern of the cloth seemed repulsively loud. This, then, she admitted, with a touch of cynicism unusual to her nature, was the paragon who had shared her bed for so many months, and had occupied her thoughts ever since. She shuddered, and perhaps a little ashamed, but at the same time quite calmly, without haste or rage, removing the photograph from its frame, she tore it into bits, which she scattered in the waste-paper-basket.

For a few seconds, possibly for the better part of a minute, the Countess Nattatorrini unlocked the secret chambers of her soul which she had kept

locked for many years, in the manner, if report may be relied upon, of a person descending for the third time towards an ocean grave. Ruthlessly, she examined her past. She recognized, indeed, that what had happened was what had happened before in the case of Cyril, the young English boy whom she had met at Cannes in 1889, what had happened in the case of Fernand, the Frenchman of an unspeakable class, with whom she had made clandestine rendezvous by Bartholdi's copper lion in the Place Denfert-Rochereau, rendezvous which had resulted in the levying of blackmail. She recalled how one day the demanded banknotes had been returned to her in an unopened envelope and the detective she had engaged to solve the mystery had reported that Fernand, trapped in some other turpitude, had been sentenced to one of the French penal colonies for life. There was Perseo, the young bersagliere with whom she had passed a few days of exquisite pleasure at Verona. There was . . . Why, she asked herself, go on? It had always been the same. And she brutally reminded herself that in certain comprehending circles she had been dubbed the artichoke. At this point she closed the portals of her memory.

She had been, she realized, younger when these other men had captured her attention; she had been more hopeful about the future when she lost them. After Tony there had risen no immediate diversion to quell the riots of outraged passion which had

overwhelmed her. On these other occasions solace in the usual form had usually quickly offered itself. She sighed as she considered her weakness and for a moment she envied Tamara, that Georgian queen who lured her lovers to her palace in the mountains, where they danced, ate, drank, loved, and then were stabbed by the satiated monarch, who caused their bodies to be tossed into the roaring torrent beneath her window. Only for a brief space did she envy Tamara, for almost immediately it was apparent to her how much more satisfactory was her own manner of desire; her own love was so lasting, gave her pleasure for so many months; even the subsequent pain, the tragic metamorphosis to disillusion, was not an emotion to be lightly regarded. Sometimes, indeed, in retrospect, the Countess almost believed that it was the pain that gave her the most vital happiness; that it was for this that she seemed destined, realizing dimly what was always ahead of her, to interminably repeat the pattern. However that might be, she summed up the whole matter in a single phrase: what had happened, it came to her with an anticipatory thrill, both delicious and agonizing, both perturbed and undisturbed by the knowledge that this affair would assuredly end as the others had ended, was what had always happened, always would happen: she had again fallen in love. She weighed herself: her capacity for experiencing the amorous passion appeared to be immeasurable; she saw herself as a

toothless hag, still pursuing some youthful phantom, searching satisfaction, always searching, and never completely finding. This was not alone her destiny but also, paradoxically, the secret of her involuntary persistence: she always hoped. There was, however, a curious confusion of bald clairvoyance and self-deception in her nature. Even as she reviewed her life she could not resist the belief that she had never *really* loved before.

An apparition, a few words: that was all. Always, that had been all that was necessary to inflame her, to send her staggering and spinning down the rough but exciting erotic highway. The thought made her tremble, made her see clearly, at the moment, what was inevitably ahead of her, her, already a middle-aged woman. Ah! tais-toi, voix impitoyable,—voix qui me dis: Thaïs, tu vieilliras! But, she consoled herself, it is my age which gives me my power, my knowledge of love. How much more I understand now than I did in my youth! It has been said that it is impossible for any actress to properly play Juliet until she is too old to look Juliet. This opinion corresponded exactly to the Countess's theory of love.

She regarded herself again in the mirror, this time more carefully, admiring her rounded hips, swelling beneath her chemise, the firm curve of her breasts, of which she had always been properly proud, the fine, bold carving of her shoulders, gleaming white in the bright illumination of her chamber;

then, with considerably less assurance, she stole a glance at her face. Little puffs, pencilled with fine lines, had formed under her eyes, but the happiness in her heart, she knew, would soon drive these away, as it had before. O, she *was* happy!

Only an apparition and a few words, but what a handsome lad! How different from the others! He had thought of her; he had questioned her about herself. He was the first to do this (the first man, at least; she had not quite forgotten Lennie Colman) since she had arrived in Maple Valley. No one else; not one of her old friends or new acquaintances had seemed to be at all interested in her. They wanted her to flatter the town; they wanted to exploit her for their own glory. To think that here, in this God-forsaken hole full of stupid fools, she had experienced again the only emotion which was precious to her. To think that, in her impatience and despair, her utter hopelessness, she had been on the point of leaving this place and going away. She shivered as she considered what the consequences of this rash act might have been.

Drawing a dressing-gown over her shoulders, she extinguished the lights, applied a match to a cigarette, and sat down in front of the open window, drawing back the shutters to allow the summer breeze to play through the heavy, starched lace-curtains, which hung from a brass rod overhead and swept the carpet beneath. Had Mayme Townsend noticed anything? she wondered. The

Countess knew her symptoms under the conditions of the first impact, knew how the colour flushed her forehead, how the light flashed in her eyes. She knew that for the remainder of the evening she had been a different person, chattering, laughing, with an almost insane gaiety. Yes, she must have seemed quite mad to these people, including her sister, who had never assisted at one of these scenes before. Lou, indeed, on the way home had appraised her strangely, a little disapprovingly, Ella thought, but had not ventured to make any comment.

The Countess reminded herself that in any case she did not care what happened amongst these provincials who had so much regard for surfaces, but who all wore hidden scars. I am tattooed on my arm while they are tattooed on their hearts, she realized with a smile. She did not care what they thought, what happened, because she could go away and take him with her. She recalled, with joy, that there were places in the world where they could live with freedom, do what they desired, where she could embrace Gareth with safety, hold him in her arms as long as it pleased her to do so. The world might smile, but elsewhere, away from Maple Valley and other towns like it, there would be no protestations of horror.

But Gareth? She had not, until now, taken into account his possible reactions to her plan. What manner of boy was he? Fresh, innocent of life, probably. He had grown up in the midst of this

rabble and would know nothing. She could not approach him as she had so readily and simply approached the others. She must, she was aware, be more wary, await her opportunity, but this prospect, on reflection, did not altogether displease her. This experience would be novel, and the pleasure she would take in the foreseen outcome would give every second of the pursuit a kind of thrill, a ruddy, amorous glow.

She had, she remembered, managed to stammer out an invitation to call. Would he heed her request? Why, she wondered, had she not met him before? To what circle of local society could he belong? Had she, in these provincial eyes, broken another law? When she had asked him to come to see her she had noted amazement in Lou's expression, something a trifle stronger, perhaps, in Mayme Townsend's. Who *was* this youth? Why had she never encountered him before? Who were his father and mother? Johns? Had she met a Mrs. Johns? She could not recall the name.

The Countess peered out upon the lawn, silver and green in the moonlight. If only he might realize that she was waiting, the blood tingling in her veins, her heart pulsing, waiting like Juliet for him to appear in the orchard below. Gareth! she whispered softly. Gareth! she called more loudly, as loudly as she dared call, leaning far over the casement. There was no reply. A faint odour of honeysuckles was wafted to her nostrils; far in the

still distance she heard the hoot of an owl; a bat sailed back and forth past the window. Sighing, she drew back into the room. Extinguishing her cigarette, she completed her disrobing, donned a filmy, rose night-dress, carefully chosen to fit her mood from a neat pile in her bureau drawer, and slipped into bed. That night the Countess Nattatorrini did not close her eyes.

In the morning the Countess descended the staircase, singing:

> Auprès de ma blonde
> Qu'il fait bon, fait bon, bon, bon,
> Auprès de ma blonde
> Qu'il fait bon dormir.

She wore a dress of pale, mauve lawn, all flounces and ruffles and shirrings, with a high collar of purple satin and Valenciennes lace. The aroma of heliotrope hovered about her hair. It was still early; Lou had not yet come downstairs, and the Countess went out to the garden, where she plucked a cluster of pink sweet-peas which she inserted in her purple satin waist-band. She had not fallen asleep during the entire night, and yet, for the first time since her arrival in Maple Valley, she felt refreshed. Her face radiated her happiness. She comprehended her destiny only too well: she knew that at best she might count on a few months of happiness, at worst on a few weeks, and she deter-

mined to enjoy herself thoroughly during this period. In any event she would not go away from this delightful town, the most delightful, she was beginning to feel, that she had ever visited, unless it should so happen that she could persuade him to go too.

She returned to the breakfast-table, collecting the Morning Star on the way and, as she ate the richly flavoured, fresh raspberries, submerged in thick clots of cream from Lou's own Jersey cow, she propped the newspaper up against the coffee urn and read the account, extremely diverting she found it, of last night's entertainment. There was a long passage devoted to a description of her costume, characterized, of course, as "very fin de siècle"; there was a complete report of the address made by the Honourable Judge Porter; there was a long paragraph celebrating the "magnificent art of Clara Barnes, Maple Valley's gifted daughter, who is soon leaving, we understand, for Chicago, to study for Grand Opera"; and there was an interminable list of the notables present, which the Countess scanned meticulously three times before she assured herself that Gareth's name was not included in it.

While Ella was sipping her coffee and munching her crisp, buttered toast and her liver and bacon, Lou came in, appearing rather tired, the Countess thought.

Good morning, Ella, she said. How well you are looking! You must have had a good sleep. It

was the longest time before I could get to sleep after all the excitement. That *is* a pretty dress, she added, as she sat down. I don't believe you've worn it here before.

The Countess was conscious of a new note in Lou's voice, a new sympathy in Lou's manner. It occurred to her to wonder if her own mood had created this illusion.

I'm feeling extraordinarily well, the Countess replied, and her tone was hearty and replete with veracity. It was a marvellous night, she added.

I should think so, commented Lou. What does the Star say?

O, there are columns.

Lou seized the paper and began to scan the pages, emitting, now and again, little chuckles of pleasure. I don't believe, she asserted, that any one else has ever been so honoured here before.

I'm really glad it's over. It was embarrassing, the Countess declared.

Lou leaned forward; her manner was warm, appealing.

Ella, she said, you do like it better here now, don't you? I watched you last night. You seemed to have changed; something seemed to have come over you.

Lou, you *are* keen. Last night, for some strange reason, I actually began to enjoy myself. . . . Not that you haven't been good to me. You've done everything you could . . . wonders, really, but

there was . . . well, I don't know how to put it. . . . It was different, that's all, from the life I have been accustomed to. It was probably my fault. . . . Suddenly, she burst out: It's because of that boy, Lou; what was his name—the boy Lennie Colman brought to our box?

It was impossible for her to keep these words from passing her lips. She could not forgo the pleasure of hearing his name uttered again.

Gareth Johns!

Yes, that's it: Gareth Johns. Lou, he is the first person I've met since I've been here who has showed any interest in *me*. O, I love you, Lou, and it's nice to be home again, but I'm tired of the creatures asking me how I like the water-works and the new depot!

Lou appeared to be rather chagrined and a little puzzled.

You ought not to mind that, Ella, she said quietly, after a moment. I suppose, she added, it's really on account of their diffidence. They are shy with you. They don't know *what* to say.

The Countess was in no mood to continue this discussion. I don't mind, Lou, I don't mind at all, especially *now,* she hastened to explain.

Now that you've opened the subject, Ella, I can speak of something that would, perhaps, have been difficult otherwise: You asked him to call?

Yes.

But I scarcely know his mother, and isn't

he rather young? I'm afraid people will talk.

Let them. I can't help it. I want to see him. He interests me. Surely nobody can talk merely because he calls. . . .

No, I suppose not, Lou replied, doubtfully, as she returned to her scansion of the newspaper.

What are you doing today, Lou? the Countess queried after a pause. I want to do every blessed thing you do today.

Why, usually . . . Lou sufficiently exhibited her astonishment.

I know. Usually, I go up to my room after breakfast to read Marcel Prévost or Anthony Hope or Edward Bellamy, but today I want to do everything you do!

This morning I'm going marketing . . .

I'm going with you!

And then to Babcock's for some denim. You know we are meeting the ladies at Mayme Townsend's this afternoon to sew for the Orphan's Home.

I'll go and sew. I'll make millions of garments for orphans!

A little later, the Countess returned from a trip to her room with a round straw toque, trimmed with violets, black feathers, and green ribbons, on her head.

I'm ready, she announced. Have you called William?

I thought we'd walk, Lou apologized. You know this is the day William mows the lawn.

All right. I'd love to walk.

They started out in the bright sunglare of a very hot day. Ella held a lace parasol between herself and the burning rays.

Good morning, ladies.

Good morning, Mrs. Baker; Lou addressed her prim neighbour, whom they had encountered on the walk.

That awful woman! the Countess commented. But I don't hate even her today.

They passed two or three boys on bicycles, who doffed their caps; and then a woman on a bicycle, wearing bloomers.

You see, Ella, Lou remarked, with one of her infrequent, feeble attempts at humour, we have the new woman here, too. I don't think bloomers are very fin de siècle, do you? Woman's greatest charm—she was perfectly serious now—is her dignity, and no woman outside long skirts is dignified.

I agree with you, the Countess responded heartily. I like dresses with long trains, the longer the better. I wish they were wearing them longer now. The present Paris fashions decree that robes shall just touch the ground, and that is all.

Now they were passing the double-house sheltering Mrs. Bierbauer and Mrs. Fox. As usual, those two females were rocking backwards and forwards on their porches.

Who are those ridiculous women, Lou? Ella

queried. They're always there, rocking, rocking. . .

That's all I know about them, Ella, Lou replied, except that it seems as if they'd always been there. I can't remember when they weren't. I don't know them. Nobody knows them. Their husbands are travelling salesmen, I think I've heard.

There is something about them that is very weird, Lou went on, but I don't know what it is. I suppose it's their permanence. They're always rocking, and one's so fat and the other's so thin. Ugh! They give me the creeps!

They crossed the tracks and entered the business section of the town, listless, dull, lazy-appearing in the morning. A few farmer's wagons stood by the kerbs, their horses hitched by halters to iron rings stapled in stone posts; a few ladies were abroad in search of food-stuffs or dress-goods; a few boys were attending to chores for their parents or employers. Presently, Lou and Ella entered the grocery store of William Ives.

The proprietor, a little man, nearly bald, with a boil on the back of his neck, bustled up to them. He was clad in a long, clean, white apron.

Good morning, ladies, he beamed, in an almost falsetto voice, and what can I do for you, this morning? The raspberries is very nice. Fresh peas has just come in.

Lou permitted a mess of wax-beans to slip through her fingers.

Give me three quarts of these.

Ella noted how much more professional Lou seemed, how much more at home she was, in this environment than elsewhere, like a painter who talked stupidly enough in society, but who became a great personage when one saw him at work before his canvas.

Yes, Miss Poore. Mr. Ives wrote the order on a pad that he carried.

Eight pounds of butter.

Yes, Miss Poore.

Five pounds of coffee. You know, mocha and java mixed.

Yes, Miss Poore.

At this point Clara Barnes entered the store.

O, Countess! Miss Poore! I'm so glad to see you, the girl exclaimed. Last night was quite a success.

You helped to make it so, was the Countess's kind response.

I did what I could. I'm always glad to sing for charity, or . . . she went on rapidly . . . for a cause like this. When I am a grand opera singer I shall always be delighted to donate my services to help others. But that Faust aria! It's so difficult. Do you suppose any one *here* knows that? No, to them it's just another ballad. *You* know it. You must have heard Faust (the whole opera, I mean) some time or other in Paris, but in Maple Valley they don't care for classical music, especially in foreign languages. They like songs like I don't

want to play in your yard better. Why, Dr. Sinclair always asks me to sing After the ball, that old chestnut! It's just years old, but he likes it and I do it for him, though I much prefer to sing classical music like Tosti, or O, promise me, which I sing in the soprano key (you know it was written originally for Jessie Bartlett Davis).

Your voice is charming, the Countess found opportunity to say, and I hope you will make a great success.

. . . . ten pounds of granulated sugar, two pounds of pulverized sugar . . .

Yes, Miss Poore.

What kind of greens have you?

I'd like to sing for you, some day, just for you, Clara announced to the Countess. Could I bring some music to the house?

I'd love to have you, the Countess replied.

The beets is very nice, Miss Poore, the grocer cajoled in his treble pitch.

No, I don't want any beets. I guess that'll be all. O, no, I forgot the corn-meal. I want to have fried mush for breakfast tomorrow.

Yes, Miss Poore. How much?

Good morning, Clara.

Good morning, Miss Poore.

Good morning, Miss Barnes.

Good morning, Countess. Will you wait on me now, please, Mr. Ives.

The ladies visited the butcher, where pork tenderloins, bacon, and a leg of lamb were purchased; then, at the dry-goods store, they sought out yards of denim, to be cut into uniforms for orphan children.

After dinner, about twelve-thirty, in the extreme heat of the day, the sisters retired to their respective rooms for naps. Ella, at last, found that she could relax. She had taken a book with her to bed to pass the time if she were unable to sleep, but this quickly dropped from her hands. Murmuring a hallowed name to herself, she fell into a deep, refreshing slumber.

At four o'clock the ladies began to gather in Mayme Townsend's big living-room, under the portrait of her father, who had fought as a Colonel in the Civil War, and had been painted in his uniform by some contemporary artist. The ladies were soon encircled by rows of work-baskets and yards and yards of blue denim, which they cut and basted, while Mrs. Sinclair at the sewing-machine swiftly joined the seams.

Did you enjoy yourself last night? Mayme Townsend demanded of the Countess.

Immensely, was Ella's reply.

I could have killed old Judge Porter. He wants to get on the school-board and he used the occasion to launch his boom.

O, I didn't mind that. I rather enjoyed his speech.

Mayme, I haven't any scissors, Mrs. Munger complained.

I'll find you a pair.

As Mrs. Townsend left the room, Effie Chase leaned forward in a confidential manner, first casting a glance towards Mrs. Sinclair's back. The machine was humming.

Edith pays no attention to anything. The doctor's behaving outrageously. I wonder if we ought to tell her.

Certainly not, Effie, it's not our business.

But, Ella, she ought to know. Everybody else knows.

She may prefer not to know.

I wonder Mayme doesn't take Sarah in hand. You notice she's not here today. I'll bet she's with the doctor this very minute.

Mayme Townsend came back into the room. I wonder, she began, if there's going to be war with Spain. Edward thinks there will be. McKinley is doing his best to avoid it, but we can't overlook another insult. That Ruiz murder . . .

Hard times . . . there's almost a panic . . . Alfreda Mitchell's mouth was full of pins.

Pass me the scissors. Thank you. If the corn crop is good . . .

The new tariff . . . McKinley . . .

Joe saw Fred Baker in Chicago last week. He was sitting at a table in the Auditorium, drinking beer!

Beer! Was he alone?

Joe just won't tell me!

I wonder if any one from here is going up to the Klondike. They say it's rich with gold . . .

My new cook makes the *best* Boston brown bread . . .

I'd like to get the recipe.

These remarks and more of the same order fell like a dead burdening on the ear of the Countess. The lively, insistent imp, who really held her attention, sang one name to her constantly: Gareth! Gareth! Gareth! At every reiteration she vibrated with pleasure, and, when some one asked her a question, she was obliged to hesitate for a moment to clear her mind of the name, temporarily, before she replied

It was half after six before the ladies folded up their work, put on their hats, and began to make their farewell speeches. It was nearly seven before Lou and Ella entered the doorway of their home.

I wonder if any one has called, Lou speculated, glancing at the silver card-tray which always stood on a table near the vestibule door. There were two new cards on the tray. She held the first to her near-sighted eyes, reading aloud, Mrs. Ray

Cameron. The second, after examination, she passed, without a word, to her sister.

The Countess trembled with regret, with rage, with excitement, with impatience, and yet with pleasure, as she read the name of Gareth Johns on the pasteboard.

Chapter XI

The morning after the entertainment at Hall's Opera House Gareth came down to breakfast in a state of high excitement. He, too, had passed a sleepless night. He found his father hidden behind the spread-out sheet of the Morning Star. His mother was drinking her coffee.

Good morning, mother, he said, as he bent over her chair to kiss her.

Good morning, Gareth dear.

Good morning, father.

Morning, Henry Johns grunted rather than greeted; nor did he remove the paper which masked his face.

Gareth began to excavate an orange with a spoon.

What awful stuff they gave that wonderful woman last night, mother.

Mrs. Johns was a little uncertain how to take this remark. She tried, conscientiously, simply because she loved him, to mould her taste on Gareth's, but she sometimes faltered in her attempts to understand this taste. Further, she did not want this taste to drift too far abroad, to cease entirely to discover interest in such things as it was possible to admire in Maple Valley.

Professor Hendricks was quite good, I thought, she advanced timidly.

O, not bad, not bad for Maple Valley, that is, but think of him having the nerve to play before *her*. Why, she's probably heard Rubinstein and Paderewski . . . may be even Liszt. And think of Clara singing to a woman who has listened to Melba and Calvé.

I see what you mean, Gareth. Are you ready for your coffee?

Yes, mother.

Mary made some of your favourite graham gems.

Presently, Mr. Johns laid down his paper, poured some coffee out of his cup into his saucer, permitted it to cool for a few seconds, and took a great gulp. Then he growled: How much longer do you intend to waste your time, young man?

That's what I want to know, father. If I'm going to college I ought to be preparing for exams.

So you haven't got that fool idea out of your head yet?

Not yet, father.

Henry, Mrs. Johns interrupted anxiously, do let the boy go. He wants to so bad.

I suppose I've got to let him do every blessed thing he wants to. Mr. Johns's tone was sarcastic.

No, of course not, but this is more important than most things, Henry, Mrs. Johns pleaded.

Well, I don't see it at all. Wasting his time going to . . . Henry Johns shook out the Star and

pointed to the double column story on the front page. What good is it going to do any one going to affairs like this? Good! It's bad for him!

Why, Henry, everybody was there. Dr. Sinclair and . . .

I suppose you call that old rake everybody!

The Atkinsons, Mrs. Townsend . . .

That old battle-face! Thinks she runs the town. Actually came to see me before the last election to ask me how I was going to vote.

Henry, let's not talk about last night any more. Please, try to see this thing my way for once. You know there are two sides to every question. Now, Gareth has set his heart on going to college, and I want to help him go. Every teacher he had in High School says he's the one boy in his class that *ought* to go. It's hard for me to give him up, harder, you know, than it is for you, but when his interest is at stake I'm not selfish . . .

O, yes, I know! He's not my son. He's nothing to do with me! He's yours, all right. Henry Johns was working himself up into a magnificent rage. Well, we'll see. He turned suddenly to Gareth: Young man, you come down to my office this morning and go to work.

Father! Gareth and his mother both knew that if he worked in the office this summer he would work there all his life.

Henry, you don't mean it, Mrs. Johns expostulated.

I do mean it. Get your hat, Gareth. You're coming along with me. I'm tired of your nonsense. It's about time you had some manliness knocked into you.

Henry Johns rose from the table without folding his napkin. He was in a furious temper. Gareth stole a look at his mother and what he saw in her face alarmed him more than anything his father had said. Her complexion had turned an ashy green. She began to groan: O! the pains have come back! She pressed her hand against her side, and tears of anguish rolled down her cheeks.

Why, Gertrude! In his crude, awkward way, Mr. Johns was as much alarmed as his son. Gareth, run for the doctor!

Mother! Mother! Gareth cried, I'll have him here right away. He rushed out of the door.

Mr. Johns, in a futile effort to alleviate his wife's suffering, began to rub her hands. She was now unconscious. She was loosely dressed in a morning robe, without stays, but he unfastened this, opening her collar. Then he carried her into the sitting-room, where he laid her gently on a couch.

Gertrude, he addressed her inanimate figure, I'm sorry I said what I did. Perhaps, I didn't mean it. We'll see.

Presently Dr. Sinclair, who, in spite of his unsavoury reputation, was the only good physician in Maple Valley, consequently including among his

patients many of his most vehement defamers, arrived. His first act was to order father and son out of the room, while he opened his black bag, removing instruments and vials and tubes, and prepared to make an examination of the sick woman. Henry Johns returned to the dining-room and lit a cigar; Gareth went out to the front porch. Mr. Arlington, the old Negro, was cutting the grass. His mother was mortally ill, probably dying, and yet everything went on as usual, the sun shone, the flowers bloomed, the birds sang, and Mr. Arlington was cutting the grass. The persistent clutter of the lawn-mower distracted Gareth's attention for a second or two. He felt deadened, almost forgetting who he was or where he was. Then a fresh burst of grief almost stopped the beating of his heart. Mother! Mother! he whispered. Don't die! He vowed to himself that he would follow out his father's wishes rather than submit his mother to another such scene.

Chet Porter passed the house, a tennis racket under his arm.

Come on an' play tennis, Gareth, he called out.

Can't.

Aw, come on. What's the matter?

Don't feel like it this morning.

Chet strolled on, unconcernedly whistling, I want you, ma honey, yes, I do.

Gareth, his senses numbed, rocked back and forth in the great porch chair. Presently, Dr. Sinclair

opened the screen-door, and emerged with his black bag.

Gareth rose. How's mother? he asked.

The crisis is past. She's better, but she must be kept quiet all day. Don't talk to her. I've got her in bed, and she'll soon be asleep. I've given her some drops. Where's your father?

I don't know. Inside, I guess. Do you want me to get him? Can't I do anything?

Nothing to do, sonny, but leave her alone. She needs rest. Later, well, perhaps in a month or two, we'll see, we can take her to the hospital. It's her only hope . . . an operation. But she's not fit for it now. Her heart . . . Sonny, did anything happen to excite her?

Yes, said Gareth, something did.

Family squabble?

Yes, Gareth replied.

It mustn't happen again, the doctor warned him, gravely. She might not be able to withstand another attack.

Henry Johns appeared in the doorway. Well, doctor? he queried anxiously.

Mother's asleep, father, Gareth explained. She's better, he added.

Must go along, the doctor said. I've got to see another patient. Gareth will tell you all about it. I'll drop in again after supper tonight. If there's more trouble . . . there won't be if she's left alone . . . send for me.

The younger man turned to the older. Father, he said, I've decided to do what you want me to, to go into the office with you, if you'll wait till tomorrow when mother's better. I don't want to leave her today. Father . . . his voice became more impassioned now . . . the doctor says any excitement is likely to kill mother. If we had another row like the one we had this morning, she isn't strong enough to stand it.

Like most obstinate men, Johns invariably crumbled under this kind of reproach. There was even a suspicion of hoarseness in his voice as he replied, Nothing's settled. Nothing's decided. You've got time. College don't begin till fall. We'll let things go on as they are for a little while.

Mother's in bed, Gareth continued, disregarding his father's advances. The doctor's coming back later. He's given her something to quiet her nerves, and he says she must be left alone.

Henry Johns began to fumble awkwardly with the great walrus-tooth charm attached to his watch-chain. After a moment, he said, Well, good-bye, Gareth. I may as well go down to the office. If anything happens—if your mother gets worse, let me know. You can ride down on your bicycle. I must have a telephone put in; it'll be easier to get the doctor then. What if anything happened in the night? I'll be home for dinner.

Rather more self-consciously pompous than ever, Henry Johns started off down the cement walk,

under the spreading boughs of the box-elders and cottonwoods. Gareth stared at the retreating figure. He was immediately aware that he hated his father more in this kindly aspect than he did when the man was his active enemy. There was something sickeningly inadequate and stupidly weak about these changes of front which always occurred after his father had been particularly unpleasant. Gareth settled back into his chair on the verandah, musing. Life was beginning to appear desperately unattractive to him. If, as he had promised, he went into business with his father that would mean the end of all his plans. On the other hand, supposing his father relented, now that his mother was so hopelessly ill, he could not go away. Whichever way he turned he seemed still imprisoned in this dull, sordid village. For the future, so it appeared, his study in the barn would be his only form of distraction, and that would only serve to remind him of the career he wanted to carve out in the world away from this narrow, provincial town. He thought of Lennie Colman and what she had meant to him, but now that he had analyzed her feeling for him he had acquired a faint distaste for Lennie Colman. Besides, he coldly considered, she had nothing more to give him. He was telling *her* what books to read now; he was more familiar with the theatres in New York and Chicago, the stars and their plays, than she was. He was, to put it bluntly, more important to Lennie Colman than she

was to him. One single method of escape from his bondage seemed to offer itself: the Countess Nattatorrini had asked him to call. She had appeared to be interested in him; she had even exhibited enthusiasm. In any case he could scarcely foresee what this introduction might lead to. She might not like him once she had seen him again; she might leave town any day. His brow knit with a fierce despair; after all, now, with his mother ill, whatever happened was of little import. He watched the old Negro, Mr. Arlington, marching up and down the lawn, pushing the heavy lawn-mower slowly in front of him, the clipped grass falling in showers on either side. In the back of his mind a dull anxiety persisted, that worry, that fear, which is more insidious, more dangerous to the system, than real physical pain. Today, his life seemed a hopeless muddle with which he had nothing at all to do. He had come to an impasse.

Rising from his chair, Gareth softly tiptoed up the carpeted steps until he stood before the closed door of his mother's chamber. Opening this door with the greatest precaution to be noiseless, he peeped into the partially darkened room. His mother lay on the bed, her hands by her sides, her face paler and more waxlike than he remembered ever to have seen it before. There was something in her appearance and her position which reminded him of death, and the ghost of a smile which hovered about her lips did not serve to

destroy this impression. Did not dead people smile?

He returned to his seat on the verandah. Clara Barnes was passing.

Hello, Gareth.

Hello, Clara.

Did you hear me last night?

Yes. He descended from the porch and joined her on the side-walk. I can't yell, he explained. Mother's asleep. Yes, I heard you. You had quite a little triumph, Clara. When are you going to Chicago?

In September, Gareth.

And some day you'll be singing in opera. . . .

In two years, Gareth.

I've never yet heard an opera . . . but I know about them all. I can tell you why Melba sang Brünnhilde in Siegfried only once. I know about Nordica's row with Jean de Reszke. I've got all their pictures, he concluded lamely.

In a few years, Gareth, I'll send you mine. I'm going to be as great as any of them. You'll see. I'd like to look at your pictures again, Gareth. Show them to me, will you?

Now? he asked, not with much enthusiasm.

Why yes, she replied, let's.

He led the way slowly back to the barn. As they passed through the doorway, she said, It's been a long time since I've been up here with you, Gareth.

He did not reply, but stood back to allow her to pass ahead of him up the stairs.

Why, Gareth, she exclaimed, as she entered the apartment, how nicely you've got it fixed up! I haven't been up here since . . .

Chet Porter used to chin himself on the trapeze, he finished her sentence quickly.

I've been here since then, she corrected him.

Again he did not reply.

What a lot of books you've got, Clara went on, her eyes roving about. I love to read.

Who's your favourite author?

Shakespeare, Clara responded promptly. I'm reading his plays straight through.

Who's your favourite modern author?

She appeared to be considering her answer. After hesitating a moment, she replied, Du Maurier, I guess. I just loved Trilby. She was a singer, you know.

Gareth opened a drawer in his old desk and drew out a big scrap-book. These are all opera stars in here, he said. I've cut them out of the Illustrated American, the Standard, Munsey's, all the magazines I could get hold of. As he and Clara seated themselves in adjacent chairs he opened the book, pointing out pictures of Melba in Pagliacci, Eames as the Countess in Figaro, Chartran's drawing of Jean de Reszke as Siegfried, Zélie de Lussan as Carmen, Clémentine de Vere as Doña Elvira,

Félia Litvinne in Le Cid, Jean Lassalle in Les Huguenots, Calvé as Ophelia. Clara, who had asked to see these pictures, did not appear to be very much interested in examining them, after all. Crossing her massive ankles, she placed her hands behind her head and leaned back in her chair.

I will be a great singer some day, Gareth, greater than any of these. I will sing at the Metropolitan Opera House and you will come to hear me. Just think, she terminated, I go to Chicago in September!

Gareth was not much impressed by this fanfare; he had discovered long since that his interest in people depended entirely on what they had to give him, and assuredly Clara could give him nothing more. He found her misplaced ambition a little vulgar. She had no adaptability; she was stupid; she was smug; she lived in castles constructed of smoke. Melba, Nordica, and Eames meant nothing to her except names of singers who were older than she and consequently were finishing their careers just when she was nearly ready to begin her own.

Gareth . . . Clara's voice was tender.

What is it? His thought took a new turning, reverting to the Countess. How soon, he wondered, could he decently call on her?

Gareth, you're not nice to me any more.

I'm just the same as I always was. Would a week, he questioned himself, be too soon, a week from today? Considering this, he decided that a week would not be too soon.

No, you're not, Clara pouted coquettishly. You used to kiss me.

Don't be foolish, Clara. Five or six days . . . After all, why not day after tomorrow, or tomorrow?

He shut the book hastily, the book which neither had been looking at for some time, and replaced it in the drawer. He was too conscious of Clara's thick ankles, of the effect her presence produced in this room, to be very comfortable. The atmosphere of Maple Valley seemed to have invaded it. How could he ever . . . ? Thinking back, he realized that she had given him a kind of knowledge. He had not made a mistake. The mistake would be to continue something that was over.

Come, Clara, he urged. Mother is sick. I must go see how she is getting on.

I thought you said she was asleep.

I am supposed to be taking care of her.

He led the way down the old staircase out into the bright sunlight. Mr. Arlington was now cutting the grass in the back-yard, and Bessie, the hired-girl, was seated on the back porch, chopping something in a wooden bowl, and singing a Bohemian melody to herself. Gareth bade a hasty good-bye to the astonished Clara and vanished through the kitchen door. He did not, however, visit his mother, whom he believed to be still asleep, but after walking slowly through the house, slowly enough to give Clara time to disappear down the

street, he emerged on the front porch and sat down in the great rocker again.

Tomorrow. Yes, he would go tomorrow. The Countess was his last chance. If she did not interest him nothing else would, and now, with his mother seriously ill, he was committed to a life in Maple Valley. If the Countess did not offer him a spiritual escape from this humdrum existence he might as well go to work for his father, conform himself to the town traditions, become an Elk, an Episcopalian, and a Republican. He smiled dismally as he considered the prospect, adding to himself bitterly, I might even grow to like it. After a little more meditation in this morbid vein, he heard the noon whistles of the factories blowing, the bells of the schools ringing in different tones all over town. It was the hour for the midday meal: his father came up the walk.

Is your mother better, Gareth? Mr. Johns asked.

She's still asleep, I think, Gareth replied.

They went into the house together. His father washed his hands in a little wash-room which opened off the hall, just inside the vestibule door. Gareth turned over the leaves of a magazine on the sitting-room table. A bell tinkled to warn them that dinner was ready, and the two men sat down before the laden board. It was a very rare occurrence for them to eat alone together. Indeed, at the moment, Gareth could not remember that it had happened

before for at least a year. His father, as a consequence, was somewhat embarrassed, but Gareth was perfectly at ease. Some people acquire poise, some never do, but Gareth had been born with it.

For dinner, there was hot veal-loaf (what remained would be served cold, garnished with parsley, for supper), boiled potatoes in cream, asparagus chopped into minute bits and stewed in milk and butter, minced lettuce and cabbage, swimming in vinegar and seasoned with salt and pepper, and hot baking-powder biscuit. In the absence of his mother, Gareth poured the tea.

There's hope for the country if the Dingley tariff bill passes, his father was making conversation. Mr. Johns never knew what to talk about with Gareth. Cleveland and the Democrats left this country in pretty bad shape . . . McKinley's doing what he can . . . Mark Hanna . . . that fool Bryan . . . may be war with Spain . . . ought to do something about Cuba . . . everybody rushing to the Klondike . . . fools . . . not enough food . . . they'll die of starvation. . . .

Gareth did not find it necessary to apply his mind to this conversation. He merely interjected a yes or a no occasionally and went on thinking about the Countess. Why not, he asked himself, go today? He must satisfy his curiosity. He could wait no longer. His impatience grew. First, Clara Barnes, now his father. Nearly every one in Maple Valley talked nonsense. Yes, he determined, he would go

today, unless his mother was worse. He could be back before the doctor arrived in the evening.

After the bread-pudding, Johns senior retired to the sitting-room, extended himself on the couch and soon began to snore. It was his invariable custom to sleep every day after his heavy midday meal. Gareth tiptoed softly upstairs to peep into his mother's room. Apparently, she had not moved. Her arms still lay relaxed by her sides; her face retained its waxy pallor and the pleasant smile. Gareth observed, however, that her bosom rose and fell regularly with her breath. Under the power of the opiate that the doctor had given her she seemed to be sleeping peacefully. She would continue, probably, to sleep until evening, when her nerves would be quiet and the pain gone. Gareth withdrew to his own bedroom and sat by the window until he saw his father off down the street; then he returned to his rocking-chair on the front porch.

About four o'clock he began to make preparations to go out. He dressed himself in a white linen shirt, a high stiff collar with a tied, white Ascot cravat, which fastened in the back, a blue serge, double-breasted suit, and high, patent-leather boots, with pointed toes. His hair was carefully brushed and parted in the centre. Last, he adjusted his broad, straw sailor. Before departing, he gave, for reassurance, one more glance into his mother's chamber; then he sallied forth down the street.

At the corner of Brewster Street and Pleasant Avenue, only two blocks above Lou Poore's house, he encountered the one person he had the least desire to meet, especially today, Lennie Colman. He would have avoided the meeting, had he had sufficient warning of her approach, but she had turned the corner so suddenly that she was upon him before escape was possible. Fortunately, however, she was headed in the opposite direction to that he was taking.

Good afternoon, Gareth, she said, and he noted a suspiciously tremulous quality in her voice.

Good afternoon, Miss Colman.

Both stopped, but there was silence for a moment. Then the school-teacher asked: Well, how did you like the Countess? Lennie's manner was far from easy or assured.

O, all right. I just wanted to meet her. He spoke casually.

She asked you to call . . .

Yes.

Are you going to?

I don't know. I don't suppose she meant it.

Gareth, she reproached him, you haven't been to see me for days.

Mother's sick, you know.

No, I didn't. I'm so sorry. Is she in bed?

Yes . . . I'm going on an errand for her now.

In that case, of course, I mustn't keep you. She hesitated, and then went on awkwardly, I was going

to ask you to come home with me and drink a pitcher of lemonade.

I can't today. I'm sorry.

Some other day . . . soon.

They bade each other farewell and went their separate ways, but Gareth walked very slowly and did not ascend the stone steps leading to the Poores' house until Lennie had disappeared over the brow of the hill. As he stood on the porch, about to ring the bell, two voices in unison from across the street sang out, Where did you get that hat? Those awful twins, Gareth muttered to himself, but he did not turn around. When Anna, answering the door, informed him that the Countess was out, he regretted that he had not followed his first instinct of waiting longer before accepting her invitation to call. He had overlooked the possibility of this contretemps. He fumbled for a card and left it with the maid. As he walked away he felt very dismal. It would now be impossible for him to repeat his call on the Countess for at least a week, and since he had come so near to seeing her he realized quite fully what a week's waiting would mean to him.

That evening, after Gareth and his father had eaten their cold supper together, Dr. Sinclair returned. Mrs. Johns had awakened at last. She was weak, but the pain was gone, her nerves were quiet. You'll be better in the morning, the doctor

assured her, but to her husband he said, She must undergo that operation as soon as she is strong enough. That's her only chance. Dr. Sinclair was fond of making brutal remarks to the relatives of his patients, the more so because he was entirely cognizant of their real opinions concerning his private life.

Gareth did not hear this bad news immediately. When the physician departed, he was sitting on the front porch, rocking back and forth in the big chair. His father was somewhere upstairs preparing for bed. What an awful day! Gareth reviewed its events; first, his father's temper, then his mother's illness, Clara Barnes's visit, the unfortunate encounter with Lennie Colman, and finally his frustrated call on the Countess.

Presently, down the street, he descried William, Lou Poore's hired-man, approaching; he was utterly astonished when William turned into the private walk leading to the Johns' porch.

Are you Master Johns? William inquired gruffly.

Gareth blushed. It had been a long time since any one had addressed him as master.

I am Gareth Johns, he replied.

Same thing, growled William. Here's a letter fer yeh!

The man dispossessed himself of a large, square envelope and departed without saying another word.

Gareth examined the envelope: in high, sprawling

letters he saw his name inscribed, followed by Esq., and below was written, By messenger. He tore the envelope open. At the head of the paper in one corner of the sheet he noted the Nattatorrini crest: a stork clutching a snake in one of its claws while he destroyed it with his beak, and the motto: Unguibus et Rostro. The lines which followed he read again and again:

My Dear Mr. Johns:

I am *so* sorry that I missed you today. I was out *such* a little while. I do not want to miss you *next time* and so I am suggesting an occasion when you may find me at home. If you have nothing better to do, drop in tomorrow evening after supper. Eight o'clock will not be *too early*. Hoping to see you then, I remain

very cordially yours,

Ella Nattatorrini.

Chapter XII

By a simple manœuvre the Countess Nattatorrini arranged to have the house to herself the following evening. She, with her sister, had accepted an invitation to play euchre at Mayme Townsend's, but, shortly before supper, she pleaded a headache, insisting, however, that her sister should keep the engagement. Lou, a little hesitantly, departed without her about half-past seven; the Countess, then, ascended to her chamber. Once alone in her room, the thought came to her that Gareth had not answered her note, had not let her know whether he was coming or not, and she occupied a bad five minutes considering the chances of his disappointing her. Suppose he should not turn up after all! This was sufficient cause for alarm; nevertheless, automatically, but persistently, she went on with her preparations to receive him, if only to distract her mind and destroy her impatience. It was an extremely warm evening and she chose to wear on this occasion, the most important, she felt, of any that she had yet spent in Maple Valley, a pale yellow frock. The sleeves, bulging slightly at the shoulder, were tight from there to the wrist and were bound with circles of green ribbon, edged with

tiny frills of yellow lace. Filmy lace also spilled from either side of the high collar, below which a square cape-collar, adorned with more green ribbon and lace, spread over her shoulders. The waist-band, too, was fashioned of green ribbon, and into this, from a vase standing on her dresser, she inserted one full-blown red rose. Searching her jewel-case, she pondered over the profusion of sunbursts, rings, and brooches, leaving them, finally, in their places. She determined to wear nc ornaments this evening. There was a virginal quality in this abstinence which appealed to her imagination. Her face she made up to appear very pale; she accented her eyelashes and eyelids with a pencil and placed the minimum of rouge high on her cheek-bones, with a dab on her chin and on her forehead above each eye. This slightly eccentric make-up was so skilfully executed as to appear almost natural.

After she had completed her toilet by spraying herself with heliotrope, the Countess lighted the remaining gas-jets (there were four on the side-walls besides the six in the chandelier) and sat down before the mirror over her bureau to regard herself, a habit that, of late, she found growing on her. Twenty years ago, she reflected, I would have dressed hurriedly, with hardly a glance at myself, but now . . . She scanned her face carefully; on a dimly lit porch, she fully believed, and not without some justification, she might pass for thirty-five. Her happiness had quickly ironed out the puffs under

her eyes; the frown which occasionally disfigured the keystone of her brow had utterly vanished. The lines under her sagging but now well-supported chin were concealed beneath the high, close-fitting collar. She thanked God and Monsieur Worth for this mode. She had laced herself so tightly that her waist appeared to be almost slender. Above and below her waist-line her breasts and her hips curved pleasingly. A trifle too stout, her figure was still good. She must be more careful of her diet, she assured herself, not too ruefully.

Now that she was ready, again she became the prey of her anxiety and impatience. Fully dressed, she had nothing to occupy her mind until the youth arrived, and the question once more became paramount: Would he arrive? The reflection that he would almost certainly have informed her if he were not coming somewhat reassured her; she was able to derive some small comfort from this belief and, after extinguishing the gas, she descended the stairs. The servants were still busy in the rear of the house, completing the tasks of the day, preparing to retire. The Countess had announced at supper her intention of going to bed immediately, and Lou had told Anna that under the circumstances it would not be necessary for her to wait up to answer the bell.

It was exactly eight-fifteen when the Countess opened the screen-door and walked out to the porch. It was still twilight; darkness had not yet fallen, but a lamp-lighter was lighting the street-

lamp at the corner. On the porch opposite, to the accompaniment of shouts of ribald laughter, the Atkinson twins were entertaining their boy friends. The Countess recognized the voices of Chet Porter and Ray Cameron. From another house, a little farther away, drifted the tinkle of mandolins. In the street below a band of children had gathered around a bon-fire. Another group was playing Pom-Pom-Pullaway and Prisoner's Base. She could hear the shrill treble of a boy's voice counting out:

Eenie, meenie, minie, moe,
Catch a nigger by the toe,
When he hollers let him go,
Eenie, meenie, minie, moe.

A little later, yet more shrilly, this variant:

Eenie, meenie, minie, moe,
Feenie, feenie, finie, foe,
Amanutser, papatutser,
Ring-a-ban-JO!

Then the inevitable: You're IT! Victorias, landaus, surreys passed, their wheels rattling, the horses' hoofs clattering, on the worn cedar-blocks of the pavement. The Countess recognized some of the occupants of these vehicles. Hats were lifted; bows exchanged.

The air was delicious; it was warm but it bore a delicately ambiguous fragrance as its essence.

The flowers in the garden seemed to be expelling their odours like incense-burners in Chinese pagodas. The Countess could not separate these odours or identify them; she merely enjoyed the impression of a pleasant and sensual aroma. The porch was attractive. Woodbine and Virginia creeper clambered over a wire trellis, concealing a nook of the porch from the view of the street. Baskets bound in moss, in which ferns were growing, hung from chains attached to the ceiling. There were wicker-chairs and tables, cushions and rugs. On one of the tables lay a pile of magazines: Harper's, The Critic, Scribner's, and a novel that Lou had been reading that afternoon, Margaret Deland's The Wisdom of Fools. The Countess lifted a palm-leaf fan and languidly waved it back and forth.

Clatter, clatter, clatter, rumble, rumble, rumble: hoofs and wheels on the pavement. . . . Tinkle, tinkle, from the mandolins. . . . You're out! . . . Shinny on your own side! . . . On the porch opposite the young people were singing:

> Nita! Juanita!
> Ask thy soul if we should part!

As she recognized this tune which she had not heard for so many years, the Countess smiled and began to hum it to herself. The chirping of a cricket caught her fleeting attention: good luck, she assured herself. The cicadæ were scraping their anatomical violas in the trees. The Countess sank

into a light revery: how pleasant all this was, and it was hers to enjoy; the strength of her emotions had cast all the people of this place out of her consciousness; only the *place* remained as a background, how suitable she would soon discover, for her future designs. She felt exactly as she had felt with Tony in Arles or Avignon, surrounded by strangers. . . . She frowned ever so slightly; she did not like this even so ephemeral impingement of Tony on her memory. Why didn't *he* come? It was growing darker.

My Bonnie lies over the ocean,
My Bonnie lies over the sea,
My Bonnie lies over the ocean,
O, bring back my Bonnie to me!
Brrrrrring back!
Brrrrrring back!
Bring back my Bonnie to me, to ME!
Brrrrrring back . . .

The Countess started. Good evening, she said, I was beginning to fear you hadn't received my note. How handsome he was! She was grateful for the shadows of night. Her heart was palpitating; she could feel the colour flooding her cheeks. As she touched his cool fingers her hand trembled.

Good evening, he replied. I should have answered your letter. I was so glad to receive it. I was afraid after I missed you yesterday that it

wouldn't be . . . that you . . . I didn't know how soon I could come again.

Apparently she was not listening. You don't know what you've done for me, she went on, waving Gareth to a seat. I was quite desperate until I met you. It doesn't seem as if I had talked of anything but the water-works and the new depot since I came to Maple Valley.

Gareth grinned. I know, he assented. It's awful, especially for strangers. It's bad enough when you live here.

When you approached me the other evening and began to ask me about myself, I nearly fainted, the Countess continued. It *was* a shock. Not that I want to talk about myself to you. I don't, at all. I want to know all about *you,* but the excuse, the reason, for my interest in you is that you pretended to be interested in me.

I wasn't pretending, Gareth replied, very quietly. I *am* interested in you, more interested than I have ever been in anybody before.

The heart of the Countess was thumping violently. Can I keep my hands away from him? she demanded of herself, and then replying to her unuttered question: But, old goose, it isn't your body that interests him, it's what you stand for, your education, your past, your experience, your mind, your background . . . and she silently adjured herself to have patience.

You know, Gareth continued, what it is like here.

Somehow I was born different, but I've never been able to get away, never seen anything else, except in my imagination. There was nobody . . . he hesitated for an instant as he thought of Lennie Colman, and then rushed on: absolutely nobody to talk to here, until . . . tantalizingly, he paused.

The Countess's eyelids fluttered. Yes, she queried, faintly, until . . . ?

Until you came.

But can't you get away? she forced herself to demand of him. Aren't you going to college, for instance?

That's just it, I can't. My mother says yes; my father says no. He can afford it all right, Gareth added bitterly, but he doesn't see the use of an education. . . . There would be no use of it if I went into business as he wants me to . . . and he's obstinate. My mother might bring him round perhaps, but she's ill, too ill. I can't let her argue with him any more; I've given up.

Poor boy, I'm so sorry, so sorry; the Countess's tone was more than sympathetic, but Gareth's remarks had relieved her mind of an insistent anxiety. I've met a Mrs. Johns somewhere, she went on tentatively. Is that . . . ?

Yes, that must have been mother. We're the only Johns family in Maple Valley.

A charming woman, the Countess asseverated, although she had no recollection of her at all. I liked her at once, so simple . . .

She's adorable, my mother . . . If it had not been for her . . .

And your father won't let you go away? How, for the moment, she worshipped Gareth's father!

No.

Well, Gareth . . . I think I'm old enough to call you Gareth . . . then make the best of it. Come to see me as often as you like. I'm not going away for a long time. Perhaps, I'll plan to live here. Let's make the best of it between us. You amuse me and I will try to amuse you!

Countess!

Begin. You'll soon see.

Begin?

Anything. We'll talk about the sky at Rimini, or the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg, or . . .

There's so much I want to ask about, but that wont amuse *you;* that will only amuse me.

You don't know me at all, Gareth. Anybody who is sympathetic amuses me . . . and you are sympathetic.

You're sympathetic to me, too.

Again the flame of a hungry tiger flashed in the Countess's eye. She was entirely unaccustomed to self-leashing, but she contrived to hold herself in check.

Let's make some lemonade, she suggested hurriedly. It's so warm, and I'm thirsty. The servants have gone to bed.

She led the way through the dimly lit house into

the great kitchen, with its white wainscot, its blue plaster walls, its range, its tubs for laundry, its white enamelled sink, its white tables. The floor was the colour of the natural wood, unpolished and unpainted, but scoured almost white.

Chop some ice, Gareth. I'll show you. She led him to the refrigerator on the back porch. Then she searched for lemons and sugar, the squeezer. Soon she was dividing lemons and pressing the juice into a pitcher. Gareth imported two lumps of ice and washed them in the sink.

The Countess began to laugh. If I could have imagined six months ago that I would be back in the kitchen of my old home squeezing lemons with a boy whom I've just met!

Gareth was silent.

I love lemonade, she went on. I hadn't drunk any in years before I came here.

So do I, he responded.

O, we'll make lots of it . . . often. There! She stirred in the sugar and, holding the pitcher under the faucet, filled it with water. Then, discovering a tray and two glasses in a cupboard, she set the pitcher on the tray and was about to lead the way back to the porch when she hesitated.

Do you speak German? she queried suddenly.

No, I am ashamed to say. I know a few words, and a few words of French. The language teachers here are so bad. I want to learn languages.

You will, the Countess said. You are the kind

of boy who learns anything easily. It will be a pleasure for me to teach you. But it doesn't matter now. I only wanted to suggest that we drink Brüderschaft.

I understand *that.*

Filling the glasses from the pitcher, she handed one to him. The other she lifted herself, and clinked it against his.

Friends and allies? she scarcely whispered.

He was silent, but assenting.

Repeat it after me, she insisted.

Friends and allies. His tone was fervent.

For ever.

For ever!

Now! Isn't the town more amusing already?

I want to die here now! he assured her.

Live here, you mean! We'll both live here.

It means something now.

Places are nothing, nothing, she said. It really doesn't matter where you are. It's the people who count.

Bearing the tray, she led the way back through the house. The clock in the library was striking the half-hour. It was very dark now on the porch. The moon had not yet risen. There was no light but that dim one which flickered through the vine-leaves from the street-lamp on the corner. The young men visiting the twins had departed, the playing children returned home to bed, but the fiddling of locusts, the chirping of crickets persisted.

Occasionally a lightning-bug flashed phosphorescence in the air. Now the mandolins tinkled again, and a voice was singing:

> Baby, Baby,
> That is the name I love!
> It's sweet as the perfume of roses;
> It's soft as the coo of the dove.
> My sweetheart may call me his darling
> His queen or his sugar-plum, may be,
> But 'tween you and me
> I'd rather that he
> Would call me his dear little baby!

The two sat silent, a little apart, but neither felt uncomfortable. Some strange electric current seemed to be flowing between them. She was tense, excited, expectant. He was rapturous. He could not remember that he had ever been so happy.

She broke the silence. Do you mind if I smoke? she asked.

O, please do; I've never seen a woman smoke.

She lighted her cigarette and offered him another, which he refused. It was an experiment he did not care to try for the first time in the presence of the Countess.

What are you doing tomorrow? she queried, after another short pause.

Whatever you want to do.

I know so little about this town, except the waterworks and the new . . .

He groaned. There are really lovely walks in the country, he suggested.

The very thing. Come for me tomorrow at eleven. We could drive . . . she considered . . . No, tomorrow, I think I'd rather walk.

After they had talked a little longer, he rose. I must go, he said.

Good-night, Gareth. Remember: demain à onze heures.

What was that?

She laughed. Tomorrow at eleven.

I'll be here.

Friends and allies!

Friends and allies!

For ever!

For ever!

He clasped her hand and walked down the steps. Standing by the railing, she watched him until his retreating figure was shut from her view. A heavenly odour was borne in on the night air. Fireflies gleamed intermittently in the vines. The moon was rising. The Countess hummed the Clair de lune from Werther softly to herself. Then, entering the house, absent-mindedly she altered this to, My Bonnie lies over the . . . swiftly she interrupted herself. He doesn't! she cried. He doesn't! He doesn't! she repeated as she ascended the staircase. Then, in a tone which added a consecration to the phrase she murmured: Io t'amo, Gareth! Io t'amo! Io t'amo . . . mon petit chou!

Chapter XIII

At breakfast the next morning the Countess plied her sister with a hundred suavities, displaying a lively and unexpected curiosity in regard to the euchre-party of the evening before, awakening thereby an entirely unprecedented degree of descriptive enthusiasm in Lou, who recalled the dresses worn by the female contestants, retold, not very successfully, some of the humorous stories which the men had related, and furnished outlines of the more brilliant plays which had been made at the card-tables. Quite suddenly, in the midst of this sprightly account, she interrupted herself to interpolate: I'm so sorry, Ella, that you couldn't go with me. How is your head this morning?

The Countess laughed aloud. Quite well, thank you, she replied. Do you know, after you left last night, before I had time to go to bed, Gareth Johns happened in. When we had talked a little while my headache disappeared. We made lemonade and had a very good time.

O! Lou stiffened at once.

Lou dear, the Countess went on, employing her most casual manner, he has promised to show me something of the country round here today, and so

I won't be back for dinner. I wonder could you ask Anna to pack me a box of sandwiches or devilled eggs?

But we've driven everywhere . . . on all the roads. There's nothing you haven't seen, Lou protested.

It's some new place that he's showing me, the Countess went on lightly. I'm not sure exactly what it is. Anyway we're going to walk. It's quite different walking: you see so much more.

Lou's stiffness increased. Very well, she responded coldly. I'll tell Anna.

I hate to be the cause of so much trouble, the Countess continued smoothly. If you'd rather, *I'll* make the sandwiches.

The cook is baking today and it *will* make trouble, Lou replied, but I'm sure she would rather have Anna make the sandwiches than have some one else fussing in the kitchen. What kind do you want?

It doesn't really matter at all, the Countess cheerfully explained. Anything will do, but don't ask her to make very many: it's too hot to eat much.

Lou pushed the swinging baize door into the kitchen and followed it through, while Ella went up to her room singing. The Countess did not see her sister again that morning. It was Anna who brought the little hamper, neatly packed and covered with a napkin, to her room. When, precisely

at eleven, Gareth was announced, the Countess was ready to go out. She handed the basket to the boy. I hope it isn't too heavy, she said.

In a little while their walk led them beyond the bounds of Ella's ordinary rounds. Soon, indeed, they were passing through a purlieu of the town which she had never seen, the quarter devoted to the Bohemian residents, where the streets were unpaved and where they walked on a wooden sidewalk. They passed rows of cottages, painted in gay colours, small stores, flaunting signs in the Czech language, which seemed, Ella thought, to contain a great many V's and Z's. The women, picturesque with bright handkerchiefs bound about their heads or worn as scarfs around their shoulders, sat on their low doorsteps. Geese, chickens, and dogs owned the yards. Here and there a bitch or a sow flat in the dust suckled her young. Straggling gardens exhibited the vegetables of the season; cucumbers, gourds, green and yellow and striated, squash, and pumpkins bulged from vines trailing over the ground. Against the houses hollyhocks reared their stalks, thick with pink and white and yellow pompons or morning-glories waved their pretty, purple bells.

I had no idea, Ella exclaimed, that Maple Valley boasted anything as curious as this. It's like a corner of old Europe. Why aren't the residents proud of this quarter instead of those stupid water-works?

Nobody ever mentions it except in depreciation,

Gareth responded. When they say Bohemytown they mean the worst.

The sun's direct rays beat down mercilessly. It was as hot a day as Ella could remember, the kind of day, indeed, which she would ordinarily have spent in bed with the blinds drawn, reading a novel, with a pitcher of some refreshing beverage on the table beside her pillow. But today she did not mind the heat.

There would be a fine opportunity for a painter here, Gareth went on.

Hélas, there are no American painters, the Countess objected.

Who are the great painters now?

For portraits, Chartran and Carolus-Duran. Duran has painted me. For landscapes, Harpignies and Corot. For animals, Rosa Bonheur. For beautiful pictures, Bastien-Lepage, Jean-Paul Laurens, Henner, and, above all, Bouguereau, whom I prefer even to Ingres and Cabanel. The pictures of these men and a few more, Gérôme, Meissonier, and Jules Breton, will always live. They are the last of the giants.

What about the impressionists?

O, the impressionists! The Countess made a gesture indicating disgust. A side issue! A freak side issue! They amounted to nothing and now that they are finished they will soon be forgotten. Painting will go back to what it was before. For my part, I recognize neither drawing, nor colouring,

nor feeling in the pictures of Monet, Renoir, and Degas. They stop where the difficulty really begins. They cannot draw and so they pass off their inability as a novel method of painting. But the world will soon return to the true art.

Have you heard, she went on with some intensity, what a dreadful thing the French government has done? It has accepted the Caillebotte collection for the Luxembourg, a collection which contains that dreadful Olympia by Manet, a cold, ugly picture. Flesh was never that colour. Bouguereau was the last painter to understand the painting of flesh, and with him the secret will die. When you come to Paris I will show you my beautiful Bouguereau.

When I come to Paris!

O, you will come! She spoke with conviction.

Their walk led them over a brow of a hill into one of the older residence quarters of the town, where stately, old-fashioned houses raised themselves at the head of broad lawns, adorned with cast-iron effigies of dogs and deer or with fountains in which Cupids held duck spouting water from their beaks; other dwellings were set deep in rich, tangled gardens of flowers and spreading trees, enclosed behind white picket-fences.

Gareth pointed to one of these. That's the old Moore house, he said.

Mabel Moore! I remember her. What has become of her?

She married and went east many years ago. I've heard mother speak of her. Sometimes she comes back here to visit her father. He is a very old man now.

A sigh escaped the Countess.

A little farther on, enclosed in an iron-fence, painted white, the cemetery began.

Do you mind, Gareth asked, walking through the cemetery? It's a short cut to where we're going.

Not at all. The Countess smiled. In Paris all tourists visit Père-Lachaise. Why shouldn't I visit the Maple Valley graveyard?

In silence, they entered the gateway and strolled down a winding path. The place, like so many village cemeteries, was not lacking in a certain disturbing, melancholy loveliness. The dark green of the cedars and cypresses, severe and solemn trees, supplied a significant contrast to the aging marble of the tombs. Weeping willows spread their drooping fronds over the urns and obelisks. The mounds were buried under myrtle coverlets. Occasionally some visitor had placed cut-flowers in a vase of water sunk in the turf near a head-stone. Here and there they observed a neglected grave, the head-stone leaning like the tower of Pisa, but the general atmosphere of the place was serene and peaceful. Ella began to wonder, indeed, why she had not heard more about it.

Presently, on a little knoll ahead of them, they

came upon a splendid granite mausoleum with grated windows, surmounted by a draped urn set on the cupola. Gazing upon it, Ella descried, in heavy letters carved over the portal, the word Poore.

Why, that's ours! she exclaimed.

Yes, Gareth assented.

Father is there. . . . It was built for him . . . and mother now, I believe.

She paused before the tomb.

Dear old father! How strange this is. I've hardly thought about him at all since I've been back here, that is I've hardly thought about him as a real person, but this resurrects him, brings him before me. A tear appeared in the corner of the Countess's eye and rolled down her cheek. She wiped her face with her handkerchief.

It's queer, she went on, what death does to us. I believe it brings us closer to the living.

I don't know anything about death, Gareth said. Nobody I've loved has ever died.

The Countess was in a revery. I loved my father, she continued. I loved him very much, but when I married Nattatorrini I went to live in Europe, and somehow I never returned . . . not until now, that is . . . too late. I never saw my father again. He was a kind man, noble in his way, a remarkable man for Iowa of that period, strong . . . and yet I've really never thought of him since I've been here. O, Lou and I have talked about him, of course. His name is mentioned nearly

every day, but I haven't *thought* about him. I haven't been conscious of him . . . until today. Do you know what I mean?

Yes, Gareth assented, I know what you mean.

This tomb that I've never seen before brings him very clearly before my mind. Isn't that queer? And now that he is in my mind I feel I want to live more than ever. . . . Death frightens me, she went on, whenever I think of it. I did not love my husband . . . she was speaking in a very low tone . . . and I was glad when he died, yes, glad, but his death terrified me. He was so young! Might that not happen to me also, I could not help asking myself, or to some one I did love? Then, quite suddenly, I began to feel more alive than ever, closer to life. Ella pressed her hand against her heart, permitting her parasol to drop to the ground. There was a moment's silence, as Gareth stooped to pick it up. Then she said, Let us go on.

They did not speak again until they had left the cemetery by a further gate, passing at once into a great field of tall grasses, spattered thickly with black-eyed Susans, waving their orange heads about the knees of the strollers. They stood high on a hill; a quarter of a mile below, the river wound in and out through a curving valley. On the opposite side of the river the bluffs were wooded, dotted here and there with white farmhouses. All was still save for the soft lowing of invisible cattle, the buzzing of insects, and the fife-like, whistled

scale of the meadowlark. Grasshoppers leaped, yellow and tawny butterflies fluttered, and iridescent dragon-flies sailed over the expanse of flowers. Black and buff bobolinks, flashing white as they flew, yellow-breasted meadowlarks, blue-birds, and cardinal grosbeaks rose from earth to sky, chittering in their passage.

How beautiful! the Countess exclaimed. How very beautiful! I've seen nothing at all like this before since I've been here. I had no idea Iowa was so lovely.

I suppose you've always driven, Gareth explained. There's no road to this hill. You have to walk to get here.

If I lived in Maple Valley I should build my house on this spot, the Countess said.

For a short time they stood silent and happy, enjoying the natural picture, but, in spite of a light breeze, the heat was oppressive, while the sun and the Countess's watch indicated that it was past midday.

Let's get out of the sun, Gareth suggested. There's an ideal spot yonder where we can sit in the shade.

He pointed to a little copse of trees and bushes to the left of their present position. Bordered by sumach, spread with maroon bloom, and mountain-ash-trees, with their glaucous foliage and vermilion berries, the copse, on entrance, proved to be a small grove of great oaks, which provided a thick and

grateful shade. In the centre of the grove there was a small clearing, where some practical picnickers of bygone days had constructed a rough table and bench.

But this is splendid! the Countess exclaimed again, simply splendid!

Rapidly, she began to unpack the hamper, discovering therein a bottle of Queen Olives, four hard-boiled eggs, sandwiches fashioned from the white meat of chicken laid on slices of tomato, forks and knives, plates and glasses.

There is nothing to drink, the Countess complained. I forgot to ask Anna to include a bottle of cold tea.

There's water here, Gareth consoled her. Just back of those trees there is a spring. He disappeared behind a screen of hazel-brush, the twigs crepitating under his feet, soon returning, the two glasses in his hands full to the brim with cool, spring water.

Gareth, the Countess ejaculated, this makes me feel like a child again. We must come here every day!

There are other wonderful places . . .

O, I don't care where we go . . . but every day!

Until you tire of seeing me . . .

That will never happen.

Smiling, she began to munch a sandwich. What are those things on your legs? she demanded.

Burdock-burrs. He stooped to pluck them off.

I did not know, she went on, that I could be so contented.

Gareth was salting his egg. He regarded the Countess closely. He was bursting with questions. There was so much that he wanted to know.

Tell me, he selected as a beginning, what was the most wonderful night you ever spent in the theatre?

She pondered. Let me see . . . I haven't thought about the theatre for such a long time . . . I've been so much. Perhaps the première of Sybil Sanderson in Esclarmonde. That was in '89 during the Paris exposition. I love the music of Massenet. He is, I believe, my favourite composer. What graceful and refined melodies he creates! How they lift one, too! He is a master of sentiment; he has the keys to the heart of any woman who loves music. Do you know the Méditation from Thaïs?

Gareth shook his head.

She began to hum it. That was a night: she reverted to Esclarmonde. Sanderson was new to Paris; the opera was a novelty. What a brilliant house! She ran over some of the names. . . . Or perhaps one night when Marie Van Zandt sang Lakmé. You see, in 1894, she broke down on the stage during a performance of The Barber of Seville. The audience, believing her to be intoxicated, hissed her. The next season she returned to the Opéra-Comique to sing Lakmé, a rôle she had created in 1883. When she first stepped on the

stage, the hissing was so violent that you could not hear a note, but she conquered that unsympathetic public by sheer magnetism, personality, determination. By the time she began the Bell-song, the audience was ready to listen, and when she had concluded this air there was a demonstration.

But, the Countess reflected as she lighted a cigarette, that could not have been the most wonderful night. She paused for a moment. Only recently, she went on, one evening at the Scala, which is a music hall, the Princess Chimay and her . . . well, the gipsy musician Rigo for whom she left her husband . . . sat in a box to witness the skit upon their romance which was a scene in the revue. The spectators demanded that Rigo go on the stage to play his own part. When he refused there was a riot. The police were called in. I shall never know how I managed to reach my carriage. I was separated from my friends, dragged with the mob . . . She stopped suddenly. Ah! I had entirely forgotten, it was so long ago. I do know the most wonderful night of all. On the evening after Christmas one year, ever so long ago, the Duchesse de Portefin and I, on our way to join a late party, dropped into the Théâtre de la Porte St. Martin to see Sarah Bernhardt in Nana Sahib. Just as we were settled in our seats, it was announced that Marais, who played the title part, was indisposed, and that Jean Richepin, the author of the piece, and besides . . . the Countess braced

herself and went through with it this time . . . Sarah's lover in private life, would take his place. The house was immediately plunged into an uproar of astonishment, curiosity, and amused comment. You may well believe that no one left the theatre to demand his money at the contrôle.

In the first scene Nana Sahib does not appear; so you can imagine with what impatience we followed its course. When the curtain rose on the second tableau, exposing Jean Richepin reclining on a nest of cushions, the audience shouted its admiration and approval. You see the young poet—he was young then—was an ideal realization of the half-savage type he had created and which, on this occasion, he was interpreting. Tall, dark, with black, curly hair, and piercing eyes the colour of ripe figs, a sardonic smile playing over his lips, he had only to appear to conquer the public. Then, of course, there was Sarah, heaven-defying in her passion; goddess-like in her tragic scenes. Richepin, the magnificent barbarian, did not attempt to act: he merely *was* Nana Sahib while Sarah *was* Djelma. They were being indiscreet in public, that was all. They had invited the world to witness one manifestation of their frank passion. . . .

I never heard anything so wonderful before in my life, Gareth exclaimed, enthusiastically.

The springtime of their romance was much talked about in Paris, the Countess continued in a kind of ecstasy. It began long before the scene in the

theatre that I have been describing. Richepin had encountered Sarah, accompanied by her maid, in the street one night. Closing her in his arms, he had embraced her; she struck him . . . and so their love began.

And what happened after . . . after Nana Sahib? Gareth demanded eagerly.

After? The Countess sighed. Richepin tired of her, naturally. He sailed for Newfoundland, or was it Madagascar? Sarah's heart was broken . . . for a few months.

What a woman! Will I never see her? Gareth mused.

You must bear in mind, the Countess went on, that all this happened a long time ago. At the period of which I am speaking Sarah was more discussed than any one else in Paris. With what chic she wore her clothes! Her slimness was a myth! And what a voice! Now she is old. Paris is tired of her. Only this spring I saw her in La Samaritaine, Rostand's new play. She is no longer the same. Her voice has lost its golden quality. She will, no doubt, soon retire, and in the twentieth century new idols will arise.

Who is there, Gareth demanded, to take her place?

The Countess considered. Frankly, she said, nobody. Her place was unique, but there are many interesting actresses. There is Réjane, of course, but she is not much younger than Sarah. I saw her

only last year in Porto-Riche's comedy, Amoureuse. Cécile Sorel, perhaps . . . Jane Hading . . . No, she is too cold. Eve Lavallière is delightful in comedy; Armande Cassive very funny in farce. But there is no one to take Sarah's place. The twentieth century will have to stagger along without a Bernhardt.

Gareth did not appear to be listening. After the Countess had finished speaking, he was silent for a moment before he said: I was thinking how different life is in Paris. People there seem to be able to be themselves, to do what they want to do, to live for love or whatever it is they want to live for.

It is quite true, the Countess replied, and I know what you are thinking about. Life is inverted here in Maple Valley. At first I couldn't understand it: everything seemed so queer. Everybody is busy trying to conceal his vices or his amiable faults, or what others consider vices or amiable faults; one only tells the public how good one is, how intelligent, how charitable. These, people . . . I feel I can speak frankly to you, Gareth . . . have their love affairs, you must be aware, just as we . . . just as people in Paris do . . . but they have them behind closed doors and make clothes for the orphan out in the open. It is quite the opposite where I come from. People there are generally kind, good at heart. They do wonderful things for one another, but secretly . . . while what here would be called

their private life is all on the surface. Everybody knows about it, yet nobody cares. It is, the Countess added, the existence I prefer.

So would I! Gareth asserted fervently, but how will I ever be able to break away from this place?

That will come, the Countess assured him, laying her hand on his arm. In the meantime. . . . she withdrew her hand . . . let us enjoy ourselves here. Something will happen; you'll see. Something always does if you want it badly enough. We all get what we live for.

I've wanted, Gareth said, all my life to meet some one like you.

You see, the Countess responded, you wanted it, and you got your wish.

The sun was a flaming globe of fire descending behind the hills on the far bank of the river when they started back home. Again they paused at the top of the hill, which, in the late afternoon light seemed to be carpeted with orange and black. Suddenly, and at the same instant, they both became aware that they were not alone: reclining, their faces, just emerging from the tall grass, half-way down the hill, pressed together in the warmth of an embrace, the Countess and Gareth recognized Dr. Sinclair and Sarah Wiltbank.

Chapter XIV

After their quarrel which had terminated in so disastrous a manner, Mr. and Mrs. Johns had not again recurred to the subject of Gareth going to college. It seemed to be tacitly understood between them that they were never to refer to it. In compensation, Mr. Johns, for his part, said nothing more about inducting Gareth into his business. The boy himself was so entirely satisfied with his present mode of passing his hours, that he astonished his mother by making no more references to his future even when he was alone with her. She herself had introduced the topic once or twice, but he put her off with: Let us wait; perhaps father will change his mind, or There's plenty of time. I can get into Chicago without entrance examinations; I can even enter there after Christmas.

It was now late in August, and Gareth's attention was entirely concentrated. He consistently refused Chet Porter's invitations to play tennis; he deliberately ignored the crude blandishments of Clara Barnes; he did not even, now, see Lennie Colman, except occasionally, in passing, on the street, quite fortuitous and unfortunate encounters, when she spoke to him, he was aware, as if she were unbear-

ably hurt. His days were entirely divided between the Countess and his study in the barn. With the first of these preoccupations the town was ringing, and it was only by virtue of that curious local code which prevented Mrs. Baker from learning of her husband's Chicago escapades that the scandal of Gareth's adventures was kept from the ears of his father and mother. As for the second, his collections no longer served to interest him, but he found his study a most desirable spot in which to indulge in sympathetic revery.

Gareth and the Countess spent part of every day together; sometimes the whole day; sometimes a portion of the evening. They went on long walks; they went bicycling; they went driving. They explored the surrounding country in every direction within a radius of twenty miles. To the boy these golden hours atoned for all the dulness and involuntary banality of his past. He was beginning, indeed, to enjoy the fulfilment of his yearnings, yearnings which had perceptibly developed in their scope, as his opportunities opened before him. He was quite certain now that something would happen, even if he had to make it happen, which, eventually, would carry him far away from the present, undesirable scene into realms where he might conceivably spread his wings with completer ease. His imagination, no longer fettered, now pictured college to him as a small and unimportant makeshift ambition. Now, rather, in his mind's eye, he stood

before the Parthenon, rode the Argentina pampas, strolled nonchalantly into the Café de Paris at Monte Carlo, rested on the ancient stones at Taormina, below Ætna, invaded indifferently the depths of the Congo and the Colosseum at Rome, and, more frequently still and with the greatest delight of all, drove in an open carriage behind two horses in the Bois de Boulogne. Always, in these dream excursions, he was accompanied by a handsome, plump, red-haired woman, three times his age, who sat on the seat beside him or strolled with her hand on his arm. He had come, indeed, recognizing fully that some compromise is necessary in the primeval stages of any ambition, to regard the Countess as an essential factor in his immediate future. She was the way out, the prospective fulfiller of his visions, and he understood that in some inexplicable manner he signified to her a cognate form of release. Nevertheless, he could not help wondering why this woman who had lived with brilliant people in brilliant places, who had it in her power to occupy her apartment at Paris or her villas at Cannes and Settignano, had determined to visit her old home. Nor could he quite fathom why, once here, she had selected him as the beneficiary of her particular interest. The answers to these riddles were, in one sense, a mystery to him. His deep, instinct, however, informed him that she *was* interested in him, that, quite possibly, he meant even more to her than she to him. His desirability lay,

he was prone to believe, in his apparent freshness, his ostensible quality of having remained untouched, a quality, he knew, to be sure, to be a creation of her own fancy, but he made no effort to dislodge this error from her mind. Furthermore, he reflected, had she known everything there was to know, she might still have found him comparatively inexperienced. She could not, in any case, so long as he concealed the truth from her, have any conception of how much he had already lived in his imagination, how much he had already felt. Above all else, she could not be aware, he perceived, that he was prepared to leap all chasms, to break all bonds. It was impossible for her to realize that she had met, perhaps for the first time in her life, a boy who, however innocent of active participation, was almost entirely free from inhibitions, prejudices, who was intolerant only of superstitions, conventions, and village moral idiocies. It was quite apparent to him, almost from the outset, that a revelation of this fact might have the undesirable effect of destroying her interest. It was entirely conceivable that by far the greater part of her present feeling for him was created by her hope of conquering his imagined reluctance.

Sitting alone one day in his study among his books and photographs, he considered these matters. Before him, on his desk, in an engraved silver frame, stood a photograph of the Countess, taken by Reutlinger in Paris. It was a photograph in

evening dress, full-figure. She was represented as descending a staircase; one foot, therefore, was poised below the other. Her robe was partially concealed by a brocaded velvet evening cape, bordered with broad bands of sable, but her throat, and her left arm to the elbow, were exposed. He scanned the tattooed arm. Often, in curiosity, he had stared at this arm, but he had refrained from questioning her concerning it. Never, indeed, had he asked her any personal questions, and she had, he reflected, imparted comparatively little information about herself save that she had loathed her husband. Gareth recalled how long it had been since the death of Nattatorrini. Since then, the boy was convinced, she must have experienced love, once, twice, perhaps many times. In spite of her reservations, there had been nothing awkward or amateurish about her approach. She had, he was assured, none of the silly reticences, silly, certainly, in a woman of middle-age, of Madame Walter. She would have, he knew, whatever happened, no vain regrets. She was not a foolish female diving at the last possible moment into a sea of passion in which she had hitherto refrained from even wetting her feet; of that he felt quite positive. No, her photographed face told him in this respect more even than he had derived from personal contact with her. It was the face of a woman who had never denied herself satisfaction of any nature whatever; God, in turn, had done his part, sending a

great deal of experience, by which she had profited, her way. That was the explanation of her comparatively youthful appearance.

Her comparatively youthful appearance! How old was she? Gareth recalled her touched-up hair, the enamelling of her face, her well-rounded figure, the figure of maturity, the puffs and lines under her eyes. How little, for what he for the moment wanted, this mattered, after all. He was not searching for a slender, young girl, not, for instance, for Clara Barnes. He was not considering what he might do for a wife; in thinking of marriage, and he included the idea of marriage with the Countess within the range of possibility, he weighed in his mind what a wife might do for him. The Countess could do everything, everything, that is, that he wanted. She had it in her power to reveal to him all that his imagination had taught him about art, life, and the world in general. In the beginning, she could perform the initial service of freeing him from the environment which until now had stifled him, take him away from this cursed town for ever, to set him down in a milieu where he might expand and grow. To this end he was willing to make some primary sacrifices in the matter of taste.

There had not, he recalled, passed one word of love between them. That had been suggested rather than spoken, and suggested only by the Countess. At such moments, always on his guard,

he had taken care to be more than usually provocatively aloof, indifferent. She was, he felt certain, a woman for whom friendship was only a degrading evasion of a franker emotion. Friendship, Brüderschaft, assuredly was not her goal. Consideration of this naïve duplicity on the part of the Countess brought a smile to his lips. No advances, however, must come from him. She must decide in her own way, in her own time, what to do, and how to do it. One false move and the structure he had erected with so much careful appearance of inappetency might totter and crumble. She might find him too eager, too lacking in the essential innocence she seemed to crave. Without any more actual experience with women than that which his relationships with Clara Barnes and Lennie Colman had afforded him, his instinct taught him this. He belonged, apparently, to that small class of individuals for whom initiative is an error, to that still smaller class, indeed, who recognize this fact. Where or how he was led, then, would depend entirely on the Countess. He was certain, however, that the time was fast approaching when she would make some kind of attack.

The Countess, as much as, possibly more than, Gareth was a prey to meditation. Whenever she was alone one name was in her thoughts, one prayer was on her lips. She, too, at heart, was utterly unfettered by inhibitions, prejudices, and conven-

tions. Here in her old home, even less than in Paris, she really cared little about what people might say or do, if she got what she wanted. That was the qualifying point, however, she *must* get what she wanted. Therefore she proceeded with caution in the general direction of her goal. Meeting Gareth every day was something, a good deal, in fact, and when a suitable opportunity presented itself, when she had some inkling, some trifling intimation, of how much he understood of her desire, she would undertake to make the most of it. She must, however, until that opportunity offered itself, be patient. Gareth's demeanour and deportment, up to now, had given her no faint clue as to the actual state of his feelings. No doubt he was fond of her, interested in her, flattered by her attentions; she fascinated him, but that was a very different emotion from the object of her quest. She was on the verge, indeed, of submitting him to the extreme test that a passionate, middle-aged woman's love would set before him. Once she let herself go, there could be no turning back, and she could afford to take no chances on his escaping her. In Rouen, in Florence, she might have risked a refusal; in spite of it she could go on lavishing, demanding, but here in Maple Valley a refusal might precipitate a scandal of which one possible result would be the removal of Gareth out of her reach.

Occasionally, the Countess considered Lou, fully aware, at last, that the propinquity of kinswomen

was very depressing. Ella wondered if Lou really believed she was living at all. Lou's existence seemed to be devoted to making clothes for orphans, paying calls, keeping house, and gossiping, and yet Lou seemed satisfied. There were women, it seemed, who could live on from day to day without a feeling for beauty, or a thought of love.

The relations between the two sisters had become exceedingly strained. With a curious form of delicacy, not at all rare with spinsters in provincial towns of America, Lou had stopped speaking to Ella about what was uppermost in her mind. She could not bring herself to beg her sister to refrain from seeing Gareth; she could not, indeed, bring herself to mention his name at all. Her manner, however, had altered; the expression of her face and tone was reproachful, and as time went on, the Countess devoting herself more and more to the object of her passion, choosing rather to see him than to attend euchre-parties, teas, picnics, and lap-suppers, arranged more or less in her honour, Lou's anxiety increased.

One day, while the ladies were sewing for the orphans at Mayme Townsend's, the Countess, as usual, absent, Lou's crestfallen air was sufficiently apparent to attract general attention. She had, earlier in the day, attempted to urge upon Ella the advisibility of attending this function, but her arguments had not been heeded. The Countess had

declared, indeed, with her habitual frankness, that she had no intention of remaining indoors sewing when she might enjoy a long bicycle ride with her young cavalier. Reflection over this defeat was responsible for Lou's worried mien on this afternoon. Mayme Townsend who, like the others, had noted the signs of Lou's depression, whispered to her to remain after the other ladies had taken their departure.

Lou, she adjured her, when they were at last alone, it's a shame, but you must buck up. People are talking about you.

Lou began to cry. I know it, Mayme, she said. I just can't bear it any longer.

There, there, dear, Mayme Townsend attempted to console her. She waited a moment to enable Lou to acquire some control of herself, and then queried with slightly more severity (there was indeed a censorious note in her voice), Have you done anything about it? Have you talked to her?

It wouldn't do any good if I did, Lou moaned. She wouldn't pay any attention. You don't know how much she's changed. She isn't the Ella we used to know. She's no longer my little sister. I simply can't talk to her *now*.

I can talk to her, Mayme Townsend said with firmness, and I will.

Early the next morning, Ella, humming to herself, was strolling about the garden, enjoying the cool, bright day, and cutting asters, when the back-door

swung open, and Mayme Townsend emerged from the house.

Hello, Mayme, the Countess hailed her, you're out early.

Yes, the other replied, adding significantly, I wanted to find you in.

The Countess frowned. What she said, however, was, We must see more of one another, Mayme. We haven't been very neighbourly lately, have we? But I'm not going away for some time. I haven't . . .

I know, Mrs. Townsend assented grimly. Then she continued, Ella, I want to talk with you. Can't we go inside?

The Countess frowned for the second time, but she replied casually, Certainly. Wait for me while I cut three or four more of these lovely asters. Slowly circling the bed, she carefully chose especially large blossoms before applying the scissors to their long stems. Now, I'm ready, she announced at last, gathering the stalks loosely in the curve of her elbow. Escorting Mayme back into the house, she selected a tall cut-glass vase, flaring at the top and set on a tumbler base, from a shelf in the butler's pantry.

Just a moment, she adjured her old friend as she filled the vase with water. Mayme stood silently by, fuming, while the Countess arranged the flowers.

There! Ella exclaimed. Aren't they lovely? I

adore asters. Still followed by Mayme, she passed on into the dining-room and placed the vase in the centre of the table. Now, what can I do for you? Let's go into the library.

Although it was early morning the shutters in the library were as usual closed but one bar of light, speckled with dancing motes of dust, penetrated the semi-obscurity. The general impression of the room, however, with its heavy black-walnut furniture and woodwork, was cool and gloomy. The ladies sat in chairs facing each other.

Good gracious, Mayme, Ella expostulated, you look like a tragedy queen! What has happened to you?

It isn't anything that's happened to me that I came to see you about, Mrs. Townsend announced, severely. It is what has happened to you. She tapped the arm of her chair with her forefinger.

Indeed! The Countess frowned again.

Ella, you know that I never go round in circles, that I never equivocate. We're old friends, and I will come straight to the point.

The Countess remained silent. In her mind she was recalling certain incidents concerning which Mayme had *not* come straight to the point.

I've known you for a long time, Ella, and that ought to give me certain privileges. We played together as children; we went to school together. When you first came back to Maple Valley we saw a good deal of each other, but . . . now she adopted

a deeply significant tone . . . I haven't seen very much of you lately. Nobody has seen very much of you lately, except . . . she hesitated.

Except, the Countess filled in promptly, Gareth Johns.

Mayme Townsend stared at her in amazement. The frankness of the Countess seemed brazen to her. Exactly, she remarked, flushing with excitement. Exactly. That's what I came to see you about. Ella, are you losing your mind? I came to warn you, for your own good: the whole town's talking about you.

I was sure of it, the Countess replied, coldly. They have so little to talk about aside from the water-works and the new depot.

Now, don't be sarcastic, Ella. Can't you see where this is heading? You must consider your position.

That is precisely what I do consider, my position.

The tone of the Countess would have warned any one sensitive to danger signals, but Mayme Townsend rushed blindly on, How *can* you be seen everywhere with that boy?

I was not aware that I was seen everywhere with him. I see him when I choose to, but my purpose has not been to arrange an exhibition. He happens to amuse and interest me . . . The Countess rose to her feet . . . However, I have no intention of defending my actions. I can't possibly conceive . . .

Yes, you can. You understand perfectly well what I mean. Ella, you're a middle-aged woman. You're as old as I am, and he's a boy seventeen years old. You are a Countess and he is the son of a wholesale grocer. Of course, if he only came to call on you *here,* it wouldn't be so bad, but you trapes all over the country with him. Ella, she pleaded, remember that this isn't Paris. They're saying terrible things about you . . . the worst, even. If you won't think of yourself, think of your sister.

I really can't see, Mayme . . . the Countess was white with anger now, but her voice was calm, incisive, bitterly cutting . . . how this is any of your business. The impertinence! she muttered, half to herself; then, turning back to her inquisitor: Why doesn't the town clean itself up first? Why not keep Fred Baker out of Chicago resorts?

Her fury was contagious: Mayme Townsend caught it. Ella, she cried, do you know what you are? You're an old sensualist! You judge everybody else, all of us, by your own rotten standards, and you think of nothing but sex. Why, you don't see this town at all except through dirty, coloured glass!

The Countess, paying no heed to this outburst, continued her catalogue of alternatives: Or ask Mrs. Cameron to stop taking morphia and making a fool of herself in public?

Ella!

Why don't you give advice to Sarah? Do you imagine, with your silly ostrich head in the sand, that the town isn't talking about your sister's relations with Dr. Sinclair? Why, the other day I saw them . . . hoarse with rage, the Countess paused.

Ella!

In any case, please don't attempt to tell me what I shall do. I shall do exactly what I please in every respect, and I shall permit you to do the same, provided you attend to your own business and don't interfere in mine.

At this point the Countess rushed abruptly from the room, leaving Mrs. Townsend to make her way alone out of the library and out of the house.

In her own bed-chamber, the Countess gave still freer play to her turbulent emotions. Marching back and forth, she shouted: Canailles! Chameaux! Idiots! Salopes! How dare they! How dare they! The bloody busy-bodies! It was a long time before she felt calm enough to sit down; when she did, as usual, she chose the chair before her mirror. For some time she examined her reflection. They will make an old woman of me, she cried, if I let them. What do they matter? Wiping her face with cold cream, she skilfully made up again. She was expecting Gareth.

By the time the boy arrived, she had succeeded in effacing the traces of her unbecoming emotion, but she was very quiet. Gareth, walking beside her, immediately sensitive to states of feeling in others,

respected her mood. At last, when they were clear of the town, the Countess broke her silence.

Thank God! she exclaimed, we're out of the place. I wish it were for ever. It stifles me, all this narrowness, this meanness, this hideous meanness. Some day God will strike these fools dead.

I've felt that way many times, the boy replied, in full sympathy.

Let us forget them, she suggested. Why should I permit them to worry me?

Gareth sensed the cause of her momentary discomfiture, but he gave no sign to this effect.

Look! he cried. Look at that flight of blackbirds!

They stood on the bank of a little lake that was rapidly being filled in to make more land for the railroad-yards, and which, besides, served as a dumping-ground for the refuse of the town. Nevertheless, the view was picturesque: the bank grew thick with willows; the marsh-like water was spiked with water-grasses and cat-tails, here and there interrupted by a placid circle, spattered with the cups of yellow water-lilies and their circular, green pads.

It's beautiful, the Countess breathed softly. Why, she demanded, should you and I be the only ones to appreciate this country? It's just as lovely in its way as anything in France or England. Even those towers over there . . . she pointed to the railroad buildings, silhouetted against the sky . . . are just as handsome in their rugged way as the old

castles of the Rhine barons. It's just this incapacity to understand beauty of any kind, physical or moral or unmoral, that shuts America off, prevents people like you and me from being really happy here. Why, as soon as a girl marries in Maple Valley, she begins to look dowdy. How can you expect a person who does not appreciate the beauty of this lake, or of your Bohemian village, to appreciate the beauty of sex? Some day, Gareth, she was now speaking with more intensity, you must visit me at Settignano. My villa there is small; everything about it is simple; but also everything about it is beautiful. On the hills in the green twilight, amongst the cypresses, the gnarled, old, grey-green olive trees, the oleanders and the daphnes, fauns dance and Pan plays his pipes, while the peasants listen to the pagan revels and enjoy them. Why, in Italy, they even tolerate the Catholic church. Everybody belongs to it, but at heart the Italians are not Catholics: they tolerate the church but, at heart, they do not believe in it. They still worship Jove and Juno and Iris and Minerva and Mars and Hebe and Ceres and Vulcan. To this day they bow down before Venus and Cupid.

How wonderful! Gareth exclaimed.

Some day, sighed the Countess, you will comprehend all this more fully . . . She began to tremble. This was not the moment, she felt, not the time or the place, to make her declaration. They were still standing by the border of the lake.

The sunlight was too bright. They might at any instant be interrupted. Forcing herself to introduce a new topic as a diversion, soon she was describing a brilliant entertainment at Paris, the great staircase with its flaming torchères, bronze Negroes, underneath which the ladies, in their dazzling jewels, their gowns of silver and cloth of gold, descended.

Were you, by any chance, Gareth asked her, at the Charity Bazaar fire?

No, she responded solemnly, but I lost many friends in that terrible holocaust. One hundred and fifty people were burned. The Vicomtesse d'Avenal . . . the Duchesse d'Alençon. What an unhappy woman! After her engagement to her cousin, Ludwig of Bavaria, was broken, she never recovered from the blow. She was glad, I feel certain, to die.

They walked farther than usual that day and it was very late when they returned to town. As he mounted the steps of his home Gareth felt peculiarly elated. Never in his life before, indeed, had he experienced such a sense of ecstasy. His father met him at the door.

Gareth, where have you been? he asked, and Gareth was immediately conscious of an unaccountably gentle note in his father's voice. We've been looking for you all over.

From this last phrase Gareth caught an alarm. What is the matter, father? he demanded.

Your mother . . .

Dead?

Thank God, no, Gareth, but she is very ill. Dr. Sinclair says she must be taken to the hospital tonight. He will operate tomorrow.

Nor was the Countess's day ended. She had taken a bath and changed her dress before supper, when a late caller was announced, a caller who did not ask for Lou. Somewhat puzzled, the Countess descended the staircase to greet Lennie Colman. A very long time had elapsed since she had asked Lennie to call; now, indeed, she had lost all interest in having her call. Nor was the Countess aware that Gareth and Lennie had been great friends. He, as a matter of fact, had never spoken of the school-teacher to Ella.

When the Countess entered the library she was not reassured by Lennie's manner. Self-consciously, the woman greeted her, and then seemed unable to utter another word. The Countess chattered about the weather, about people they both knew, finally, about anything that came into her head, but she was unable to elicit more than a simple negative or affirmative monosyllable from her caller. At last, giving up hope, she too sank into comparative silence. For a time they both sat together speechless in the dimly lit room. Presently, however, Lennie was able to shake off something of her reserve; she regained enough courage to speak.

I suppose, she began, that you're wondering why I came to see you.

Why, no, said the Countess. I asked you to come.

At least you should wonder why I have not come sooner.

I confess, the Countess responded, that that has puzzled me.

I'll tell you why, Lennie went on in a dull, dead voice. I didn't come because I hate you!

Completely astonished—she wondered if the woman were mad—the Countess could only echo interrogatively: Hate me? Why?

That's it. You don't know. That's why I had to make myself come to see you. I don't suppose he's ever told you how much he means to me?

The Countess began to comprehend. Nevertheless, she thought it advisible to feign to be still mystified.

I don't know in the least what you are talking about, Miss Colman.

Lennie covered her face with her palms and began to sob. Please, she begged, please give him back to me.

Give whom back to you? the Countess demanded.

You know! O, you must know! Gareth. You have so much and I have so little. He was the only bright spot in my life. Now you've taken him away. O, you can go to Europe, to your friends. Everything is open to you. But . . . there is

nothing, nobody in this world for me but Gareth.

My dear Miss Colman, I'm afraid I don't understand, the Countess said. Do you mean that he was engaged to marry you?

O, no! He hasn't the slightest idea, not the slightest! You mustn't tell him how I feel! Promise me you won't tell him. He used to come to see me. We read together, talked together. Since he met you he has not been near me.

The woman was sobbing aloud. The Countess, reassured by what Lennie had said, treated her more kindly. There, there, she comforted her, stroking the girl's hands, don't cry. I didn't know about this . . . about your . . . I'll see what I can do. I'll ask him to call on you.

You will? Lennie stared at her.

Certainly, I'll do what I can.

Then he does love you! Then what they say is true! You can send him to me. You have that power! I hate you. I tell you, I hate you!

Chapter XV

Gareth paced up and down the stuffy, narrow hallway of St. Paul's Hospital. The plaster was peeling from the white walls on which hung, each a little askew, a photograph of one of the founders, a man with a long white beard, a photograph of the Reverend Arthur Crandall, Rector of the Maple Valley Episcopal Church and President of the Board of Directors of the hospital, and a large photogravure of Rembrandt's Anatomy Lesson, which Mrs. Townsend had brought back from a European tour and presented to the institution. The pungent odours of iodoform and ether married unpleasantly in Gareth's nostrils. In one of the bedrooms on the second storey his mother lay, waiting for Dr. Sinclair to perform the operation. From the moment the night before when his father had told him what was going to happen, he had known that his mother would die. Dr. Sinclair himself had been extremely dubious, but he had announced that her only hope lay in submitting to the knife. The predatory tumour must be removed, but the physician could not predict what effect the ether might have on her uncertain heart. Gareth could

predict; he *knew*. A nurse, in her white uniform, and one of the interns came out of the office and passed, chattering and laughing, up the stairs. It was in this mood, Gareth reflected, that they were about to enter the doomed woman's chamber.

The boy had a moment of bitter realization when he felt that everything he cared about in life was passing. So far there had been only his mother. She had been the only human being capable of inspiring love in him. He reviewed her meagre life with his stupid, ununderstanding father, and he regretted so fondly, so vainly, that he had not done more himself to make her happy. Ten minutes before when he had kissed her and promised her that he would wait, she had assured him that it was he who had given her existence beauty and meaning, but he recognized in this only an attempt to comfort from a woman on her deathbed. It was his nature only to take, never to give, but it was ironic that this quality, consistently enough, had prevented his giving in the one instance in which he would have been capable. She it was who had given freely, given everything, to him, and just now it could not occur to Gareth that this had been her only pleasure. By accepting what she had to offer he had given her all that it was in her power to appreciate.

As he paced interminably from one end of the narrow hallway to the other he became, for the first time in his life (and quite possibly the last)

the prey of regret. What tortured him, what burned his consciousness, was the knowledge that now it was too late. How deeply he had loved her, and how little he had told her of his love! If only he might go under the knife in her stead!

Restless, unnerved, he entered the little parlour, with its golden-oak, machine-carved, polished furniture and woodwork, the chairs upholstered in a well-worn rep. Behind the glass door of the bookcase, three rows of medical works caught his eye. Seating himself, he attempted to count the red roses in the ingrain carpet. He could not, however, remain long in one position; almost immediately, indeed, he rose to resume his nervous march. Now, standing before the window, his nose snubbed against the glass, he observed his father and Dr. Sinclair approaching up the walk. His father seemed older, really senile, Gareth thought, for so comparatively young a man.

Gareth could hear Dr. Sinclair's boots squeak as he ascended the stairs to the upper floor. Mr. Johns entered the parlour. His hands were trembling, and there was an expression in his eyes, a haunted, hurt look, that Gareth had never seen there before. Instantly, the boy became aware that it gave him a certain satisfaction, even to some extent relieved his own pain, to be conscious of his father's suffering.

My son, the man began, it will be over in a few moments. There is a chance . . . He stammered on, searching for words. It was difficult for him

to speak; a wall had grown up between father and son. Yet, above all, what Mr. Johns most desired at this hour was that his son should love him . . . Gareth, he was finally able to manage, one thing I want you to know: whether your mother . . . He stopped again, wiping his brow with his great white handkerchief. Why had his father waited until now to give him any evidence of affection? was what Gareth was thinking. How awkward he was, how stupid, how crude, how downright ugly! How Gareth hated him! . . . His father was making a new attempt to break down the old wall: I want you to know . . . There was another pause. The ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece became extremely audible. A fly buzzed across the window-pane. Gareth sat down . . . that whatever happens . . . the man got it out at last . . . you are going to college. Your mother wished it and now her wishes are sacred to me.

Thank you, father, Gareth replied coldly, but with as little indifference as he was able to assume. How his hatred for his father intensified. His mother had to die to compel his father to make this promise. Had she lived he would never have given in. She was a martyr to her love for her son, and the cruel obstinacy of the fatuous fool she had married. How Gareth hated his father! Whether his mother lived or died he would always hate him now, hate him more than ever. Nothing could ever happen to bring them closer together, to make

it possible for him to live under the same roof with this man again.

Mr. Johns was struggling with himself in a vain attempt to give some further sign of his affection for his son. His agony was pitifully apparent, offered in itself the basis for an immediate reconciliation, would have, if Gareth had rushed into his arms at this juncture, opened the way for a complete understanding in the future. Gareth knew this quite well, but the knowledge served only to make him harder, more aloof than ever. For a stronger emotion controlled him: the consciousness that the more his father suffered, the more content he himself would be. He wanted his father to suffer; he wanted him to suffer as much as they had suffered —his mother and he—through him. So Gareth made no move, said not a word, and his father did not immediately speak again. The clock ticked on, while Gareth returned to his position by the window. The trees were bright green in the sunlight of the morning. Birds hopped from branch to branch. Life everywhere, and yet his mother had to die. The tears coursed slowly down his cheeks. Behind him he heard his father moaning. Suddenly he was aware that some one else had entered the room. Sensing what this fact portended he did not turn about. He heard the nurse's voice. Softly she uttered his father's name, and then stopped.

Dead. His father was speaking and his inflection was not interrogative.

Gareth turned at last. Disregarding his father's presence, he looked at the nurse.

May I see my mother? he asked.

The next two days and nights seemed to Gareth the most horrible he had ever passed. Alone with his grief in the house with his father's grief, for which he had no respect, no sympathy, the strain became well-nigh unendurable. His grandmother and grandfather arrived from Keokuk. To these elderly people death was merely one of the expected incidentals of existence; they spoke of their daughter, recalling many episodes in her past, as casually as if she were sitting in the next room. Neighbours came in. The undertaker and his assistants, all dressed in black, blotted the rooms. There was a procession of boys with boxes of flowers.

On the afternoon of the day his mother died, Gareth had received a note from the Countess.

You must know, dear Gareth, it read, that any sorrow of yours is doubly mine, but now I can only shake your hand in silent sympathy. I feel helpless to do more. If you are like me, I cannot help thinking you would rather be alone for a while, but the moment you want to see me, come. I am always waiting.

Gareth pressed this note to his lips fervently, while his face hardened into complete decision.

Lennie Colman, of course, came to see him, and

he found her tearful sympathy, her attempts at consolation, very hard to put up with. She took advantage of this opportunity to express her feeling for him in a way that seemed to him almost indecent. With her, too, he was through. She had done what she could, meant well, but now her attentions only sickened him. It was not that he was entirely lacking in gratitude; rather he was aware that he had given Lennie quite as much pleasure as she had ever given him, and that any future giving must come from him alone, for he had no further desire for anything that she could offer. Besides, he reflected, what she had done she had done for her own sake, not his.

After the ladies had arranged the flowers in vases, they retired late in the afternoon, leaving Gareth alone to pass an hour in the parlour near the oak box which contained all that was left of his mother. How peaceful she looked, exactly as he remembered her that day when she had lain asleep on her bed, only now her arms were folded across her breast. He tried to realize what had happened, but one emotion, one thought, persisted: he never wanted to see his father again.

Two days after the death of his mother, Gareth, with his father, his grandmother and grandfather, and a few close friends of the family, accompanied the body to Davenport, for Mrs. Johns had expressed a wish to be cremated. The journey down,

the pretence and hypocrisy of the mourning guests, the cold, bare, stone crematory chapel were a new horror to the sensitive, imaginative boy. It did not well seem to him that he could bear much more of this; at the time he was not quite fully aware that he was purging his soul of a capacity for suffering of whatever nature.

Just before the slab, on which, in her white dress, she lay, was shunted into the furnace, Gareth placed a bouquet of marigolds under the fingers of her right hand. Then he turned his head. . . .

Returning on the train, he occupied the broad seat with his father. He was silent for an hour before he said, Father I want something.

What is it my boy?

Will you let me dispose of mother's ashes?

I think that would please *her,* Gareth.

When the cannikin containing his mother's remains arrived, Gareth left the house, bearing the urn tenderly beneath his coat. He walked through the streets of the town, on out through the unpaved roads where the Bohemians lived in their little cottages, past the fine, old residences, with their cast-iron deer and dogs and fountains, and finally, through the cemetery, where, a month ago, he had been with the Countess. As he slowly paced along the gravel walk, he recalled what she had said, that death always brought her closer to life, and he knew now that this was true for him also. For the first

time he took a fierce, bitter joy in living. He went on through the little gate at the rear of the burial-ground, coming out once more on the crest of the hill, spattered with black-eyed Susans. The scene was a flood of brilliant colour, for now patches of wild purple asters, golden-rod, milk-weed, and thistle mingled with the black and orange flowers. Far down below the silver thread of the river wound in and out between the green and blue hills. In the early morning it was very silent.

Unwrapping the urn, Gareth removed the cover, and, reversing the receptacle, scattered the ashes among the flowers at his feet. He stood for a moment, dazed, before a blur obscured from his vision the loveliness of the scene. Then he flung himself face downward in the deep grass among the flowers, sobbing.

Mother! he cried. My mother!

Chapter XVI

From the field of the black-eyed Susans Gareth went directly to the Countess. He had written to tell her when he would come and she was waiting for him. Lou had gone to visit Alice Leatherbury, who had been removed to a hospital on the edge of town. Anna, having completed her sweeping and dusting, had retired to the kitchen. The Countess had dressed herself very carefully for this rendezvous, entirely in white, a soft, lace gown with a high lace collar and long lace sleeves, the bodice trimmed with many frills, the skirt with many flounces. In her wide, ivory satin waist-band, which tied in a bow at the back with flowing streamers, she had inserted three purple asters.

After some cogitation, she had arrived at the conclusion that the parlour was too large, too formal, too cold a room in which to receive the boy on this occasion. On the whole she preferred that their meeting should take place in the library. The shutters were closed, as they usually were in the morning, but streaks of light filtered through, falling in bars on the rich, red carpet, making the room less dim.

Curiously, considering the fact that she had not seen Gareth for several days, and that an event had occurred since their last meeting which might in some way affect their future relationship, the Countess felt strangely at peace with herself and the world. A sudden calm had descended upon her spirit, a species of content, or some lack of emotion as near content as it was possible for her to experience. She had almost the sense that she had been disembodied, as though she existed completely outside the flesh. But this unnatural mood was shattered as the onyx clock on the mantel struck eleven and Anna ushered the boy into the room, for, at once aware how much he had been suffering, her accustomed perturbation returned in full force.

Poor Gareth, she murmured softly, leading him to the couch and seating herself beside him.

I hope you understand, she went on, why I have not been to see you. I just couldn't go. It seemed so superfluous for me to parade my feelings. All the time, every moment, you were before my eyes, you and your grief. I was suffering with you, Gareth, just as much as, perhaps more than, you. But I knew that if you wanted to see me you would say so.

I understood, the boy replied. It was fine of you, wonderful. I am not accustomed to anybody showing so much sensibility. If you had come I couldn't have felt the same satisfaction, the satisfaction of knowing that you were my friend, ready, waiting.

She engaged one of his hands and stroked it softly with her free palm.

It was all so sordid, hard to bear, the boy continued . . . something to get over with . . . my beloved dead and my hated living! That is what I felt. I had to stay there with her, because I wanted to protect her, if you know what I mean, from everything *she* hated too. It took just this, her death and what has followed, to make me understand just how much she had suffered, how much she had *hated* him too. And there he was all the time: I stood between him and her . . . but also, he stood between her and me.

My poor boy! Tell me all about it, all about everything you feel. It will do you good. She continued to stroke his limp hand, but he gave no evidence that he was conscious of this attention.

You see, he went on, the day my mother . . . he choked . . . just before she was operated on, my father, in the hospital, told me that I might go to college, that he had promised her . . . How I hated him then! I never knew how much I hated him before. It was almost as if she had sacrificed her life to force him to make this promise. And, at that moment, I knew, too, how she had hated him, how much she had endured for my sake. She went on, nobly, suffering *for me,* and I don't think I was worth it!

Don't say that! cried the Countess, letting, in her state of torture, his hand fall into his lap. I'm

sure that you gave your mother the greatest happiness. The other . . . well, I'm a woman and I know . . . was easy to bear, just because she was bearing it for you. I've never been a mother, Gareth, but instinctively I know how she must have felt. I would do that for you. I would . . .

The boy began to weep softly. Laying her hand on his head, the Countess caressed his hair. Silently, with great delicacy, she stroked; then, very slowly, very carefully, she leaned nearer to him, rubbing her cheek tenderly against his, the tendrils of her hair brushing his face. This slight contact inflamed her. Now, with one palm still back of his head, with the other she grasped his hand, no longer limp, and slowly, softly, she gradually shifted her position until her lips met his. He did not move, nor did he respond. For a second or two she remained poised; then, swiftly, bending forward still further, she kissed him passionately, an embrace which he returned.

At last, she ceased, drawing back her head a little way. Her cheeks were flushed, her hands trembling, her breasts rising and falling. Seizing the boy's hands in hers, she turned him about until he faced her.

Gareth, she whispered, I love you.

I love you, too, he replied.

Do you understand? she went on, almost as if she were explaining something to a child. I love you . . . that way.

I want you to, was his response.

O, my God! Her arms now thrown about his shoulders, again she pressed her lips against his. Next to her heart she could feel the thumping of his heart.

Mon petit chou! she cried. Ma soisoif! Ma faifaim! Adorable! . . . I will be everything to you: mother, mistress, wife. Tu es mon bébé!

Countess, he began . . .

Call me Ella, call me your fafemme!

Ella!

She interrupted him with another kiss.

I've loved you since the moment I first set eyes on you, she rapidly confessed. I've wanted you, suffered without you. O, I've seen you every day, but that's not enough! I want you completely!

You are all there is in my life, he replied, truthfully enough. There is no one else. I only want you, too.

Ta bouche, ange adorable!

Grasping his cheeks between her palms, again she guided his lips to hers. How moist and warm his mouth was! Dropping her head to his shoulder, she fell back against him.

After a time she became more calm. Rising from the couch she went to the hall doorway to listen for a moment. Then she returned.

You don't want to stay in this town any longer, do you? she demanded.

I'd leave this minute if I could . . . if you were going, he added.

We'll both go . . . to my place at Cannes, first. It's quiet there now. This is not the Riviera season. For a month or two we can be entirely alone. Then we'll motor down into Italy . . . to Bordighera and Spezia, the smaller towns along the shore . . . But why make plans? You shall see everything, do everything you want to do.

But Count—Ella, he continued, you know I have no money. How can I do these things?

Money! she laughed. Money! Don't worry about money. I have heaps of it, tons of it. I have more money than I know what to do with. Money! she cried. It's all yours, my divinity, to do what you please with. Spend it! Go where you desire . . . only . . . be a little kind to me, and take me with you.

Everywhere, he murmured fervently. It will not be difficult to be kind to you. You are all in the world I have to be kind to, and you have been so kind to me.

I can't wait, she cried. When shall we start?

The sooner the better so far as I am concerned. Today. This afternoon if you like. We'll take the four o'clock train east.

She pondered over this; not cautious by nature, she usually acted hastily, on impulse, but his ready acceptance of her plan paradoxically impelled her to hesitate. No, Gareth, she spoke at last, that won't

do. If I'm going away it isn't necessary to hurt Lou too much. A scandal would hurt her. Besides—obliged to divulge the real reason for their waiting, she went on, but she blushed—you are not yet of age. If your father discovered our elopement he could stop you. Somebody at the station would be sure to see us take the train: your father would be notified; he would telegraph to Clinton and you would be brought back to Maple Valley a prisoner.

I'll do whatever you tell me to, Gareth asserted, only let it be quick. I can't bear it here any longer. I can't endure the idea of going back to . . . to the house where my father lives. I never want to be reminded of him again.

She was thinking rapidly. Did you tell your father that you would go to college? she demanded at last.

No! I won't go.

Did you tell him *that?*

I told him nothing.

Her face brightened. Then, it's quite simple, she said. You must go home and explain to him that you have decided to accept his offer. The University of Chicago should begin its fall term in a couple of weeks. Find out the exact time. In a few days, I will leave for Chicago, and wait for you there, arranging, in the meantime, for our passage abroad. We'll leave the country at once, of

course. That way there'll be no chance to bring us back, no chance of separation.

I'll tell him today. You'll promise to wait?

Ah! she remonstrated, sadly, doubts already? I love you, Gareth, and I could wait for you for ever. But you? Can I be so sure of you? She paused, and a tear stood in her eye. I am no longer young.

Ella, he exclaimed, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever known!

You say that now.

Grasping her hands, he drew her to him and kissed her.

You swear to meet me, she whispered feebly.

I swear.

I believe you.

There is absolutely no one in my world but you.

I trust you, Gareth, my beloved. In a few days I will leave to wait for you at the Stratford in Chicago. Telegraph me from Clinton the hour you are arriving.

Won't I see you again before you go?

It's better not. I can tell you now that Lou is extremely upset because I have seen so much of you. She hasn't said a word; she doesn't dare, but others have not been so delicate. A sneer played about the lips of the Countess. It doesn't matter what any of them *say:* I really don't care, but they might *do* something that would spoil everything. We

have eternity before us and the world to play in: Europe, Africa, Asia . . . Why should we risk losing this for the sake of seeing each other again now?

For another half-hour they indulged in fond goodbyes, in lovers' passwords, in amorous signals, until at last—the dinner hour was approaching, and Lou was expected momentarily—Gareth rose to go. Once more she pressed his lips to hers; through the screen-door, she watched him until he had descended the stone steps. Then, sighing with happiness, she returned to the library to dream.

Gareth bounded down the street, his spirit light as air. His hour had come; he was at last a man. As he considered the possibilities of his future, he began to walk more slowly, and a smile spread over his face, for two scenes from literature had invaded his mind: Richard, Duke of Gloster, wooing the Lady Anne over the bier of Henry VI, and Bel-Ami descending the steps of the Madeleine after his marriage with Suzanne Walter.

Chapter XVII

Two days later, the Countess Nattatorrini cut short her visit to Maple Valley, leaving, as she had planned, without seeing Gareth again. She sent him a note, however, a note which began, My dearest heart, and which closed with, à bientôt, à toi. Gareth smiled as he read it. How simple life became, once it ceased being difficult! His father, formerly the great stumbling block in his path, had, through the paradoxical force of ironical circumstances, turned out to be his greatest ally. He had accepted, almost with enthusiasm, Gareth's decision to enter the University of Chicago. The University, with its recent endowment from John D. Rockefeller, was branching out, reaching for students from all the states of the middle west. At present, therefore, no entrance examinations were required, and Gareth had not prepared himself for entrance examinations.

The boy could even perceive that his father would experience a certain temporary sense of relief through his departure. The strain of their false relationship was beginning to tell on the older man. The two rarely met, infrequently came into intimate contact, except at mealtimes, and then the self-

consciousness of the father in the presence of his son was appalling. He could not say what he really wanted to say, and he would resort to a dozen subterfuges to get through with a breakfast or a dinner without being utterly silent. His favourite method of accomplishing this set purpose was to read aloud from the newspaper. One morning, for instance, while Gareth was eating his orange, his father read the report of the speech made in reply to Tsar Nicholas by Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany who, with the Kaiserin Augusta Victoria, was a guest at the Russian Court: I thank your Majesties in the name of the Empress for the cordial and magnificent reception you have accorded us, and for the gracious words with which your Majesty has so affectionately welcomed us. I especially desire to lay at the feet of your Majesty my most sincere and grateful thanks for the renewed mark of distinction which comes as such a surprise to me. I mean the enrolment of myself in your Majesty's glorious navy. This is an especial honour which I am able to appreciate to its fullest extent, and an honour which, at the same time, confers a particular distinction upon my own navy.

It is a fresh proof of the continuance of our traditional intimate relations founded upon the unshakable basis of your Majesty's unalterable resolution to keep your people in peace in the future as in the past. It finds in me also the gladdest echo. Thus we will pursue the same paths and strive

unitedly under the blessing of peace, to guide the intellectual development of our peoples. I can with full confidence lay this promise anew in the hands of your Majesty, and I know I have the support of my whole people in doing so, that I stand by your Majesty's side, with my whole strength in this great work of preserving the peace of the nation, and I will give your Majesty my strongest support against any one who may attempt to disturb or break this peace.

Another time he read from a Chicago paper a letter which G. H. Cole, a carpenter in the Klondike, had written his wife in Seattle: When I first arrived here I saw money flowing like water. First five days I worked at putting in foundations at ten dollars a day, then went to work as carpenter at fifteen dollars. Women get one hundred dollars a week for cooking. Bread is fifty cents a loaf, pies, seventy-five cents; flour, six dollars a barrel . . .

At the conclusion of these readings Gareth usually attempted to make some suitable comment, but during their course his mind wandered to pleasanter pastures. Where was he going? What was he going to do? He did not know. He did not care. He was only cognizant of the fact that at last the world was open before him, that he might do as he pleased, live as he liked. He harboured no doubts, no fears. His vivid imagination assured him that he would find his niche somewhere, once he was

free from the bondage which this town and his family life entailed. He would never come back, never see any of these people again: with a fine thrill of joy he deliberately made this vow. The town, his father, had ruined his mother's life, his mother, the only person who had ever inspired his deep affection. His escape would be his revenge on his father, his tribute to his mother. This, he felt, would please her more than anything else he might do.

That he must come to some decision in regard to the matter of his collections came to him one day while he was sitting in his room in the barn. They had served their purpose as makeshifts for what he more deeply desired, but at present they had lost what interest they had previously held for him. Now they seemed petty, unimportant. His collection of eggs, for instance: should he break them, leave them? He could not quite do either, he reflected, as he drew out the drawers and regarded the frail shells lying in their nests of cotton. He determined to present them to Chet Porter, who would consider the gift magnificent. Gareth turned to the pictures on the wall, to the bundles of photographs and cigarette-pictures of Della Fox, Nordica, and all the others, to his scrap-books. Now that he was about to see the great stars of the world, Réjane, Bernhardt, Jane Hading, Coquelin, of what use were these substitutes for the real people? He decided that they should go to Clara

Barnes. His books, perhaps his richest treasures, remained. He ran over the titles. They were good books; they had been his friends, but he knew that he would never send for them, never want them again. From the lot he selected just two which, for certain reasons, he proposed to keep by him, The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani and Bel-Ami. The others he would offer to Lennie Colman. There was, he felt, a certain ironic fitness in these various distributions.

A day or so later, meeting Clara on the street, he asked her if she wanted the photographs.

Yes, she assented indifferently, I'd like to have them. Let's get them now, she went on with more enthusiasm.

So, once again, for the last time, they ascended the steps in the barn together.

When are you going away, Gareth? she asked, while he was making a neat packet of the pictures.

Saturday, he replied.

We shall meet in Chicago, she asseverated. You know I am going a little later.

That will be dandy, was his absent-minded reply.

You know, Gareth, I wouldn't want to see many people from this old town. What do they know about art here? But you are different. You understand. Some day when I am a great singer you will be proud you knew me, Gareth.

He wondered if this rather unattractive girl with a commonplace mind ever would be a great singer.

He could remember her . . . it was not so very long ago . . . when she wore gingham aprons, carrying her slate in the curve of her arm. A year ago, even, she had worn pig-tails down her back. It was a year ago that . . .

Gareth, she continued, you've been awfully mean to me lately. Let's be friends in Chicago anyway, no matter . . .

Of course, we'll be friends, he assured her, adding hastily, I'm expecting father home soon. We have to talk over some of my plans.

You're always sending me away, Gareth, she reproached him.

After Clara had departed, the boy sat before his desk with his photograph of the Countess propped up in front of him. He regarded it critically. She was a handsome god in a car. He wondered how long he would live with her, wondered if she would tire of him before he found . . . His mind reverted to Clara. She still wanted him. Lennie wanted him. There would be others, he assured himself. There would be some one always until he learned to write. Then, well, then he would be entirely free. In getting himself out of this accursed town, he had accomplished the first step.

He did not love the Countess; he was quite aware that he never could love her. Somehow, now that she had declared herself to him, he could feel very little more respect for her than he felt for Clara

and Lennie. The distinction he made in his mind was that she could give him something, something that he wanted, while they could not. She did not . . . he was examining the photograph . . . look so very old, not nearly as old as she must be. Was she, he wondered, older than his mother? The photographer had retouched all the lines from the face, even, he noted, sliced a good bit off the curve of her hip. Nevertheless, he believed that the picture didn't unduly flatter her. She was still a handsome woman. There was intelligence in her face, animation, qualities the photograph lacked. He would not feel ridiculous with her.

He substituted another photograph for that of the Countess, a picture of his mother. He looked into the kind, grey eyes, smoothed the parted grey-brown hair, kissed the soft mouth. Quite suddenly, he realized that he had lost the gift of tears. His mother's death had made it impossible for him to cry again. Nobody else could ever affect him in the same way. If she had lived, how different his life might have been. He might eventually have gone into business with his father, sacrificed himself to his father's desires as she had sacrificed herself. He would gladly have done this for her. He would have done anything for her. But through her death he had lost all sense of pity, all capacity for deep affection. Her death had made him hard, cold, remote from the possibility of tears. There

was no one alive for whom he could now make a sacrifice. He was, indeed, living for himself alone now. He intended to do as he wished, go where he liked, know whom he fancied. He was breathless with the breadth of the opened prospect. There were no restrictions, no responsibilities of any kind. Incipit vita nuova! Incipit vita nuova! And his mother had to die to give him this freedom!

That was the complexity of life. It was a series of patterns. One weaver wove one way, another quite a different way. And no possibility of change. You patronized one weaver or another and you had to stick by your choice. He understood now. It was all quite clear to him. Life was simple to those who knew how to take what they wanted. He was one of these favoured ones; the Countess, in her way, another. For Lennie, even Clara, people who let life baffle them, who patronized the weavers that tangled the yarn, he could feel nothing but contempt.

He saw himself sitting on a sunlit Italian hill; olive-trees and marble ruins rose before him in the soft air beneath the azure sky. Below him lay the deeper blue of the Mediterranean. The vision was as crystal to him as though he had been there. Quite suddenly, he realized that he *had* been there, that Italy, Paris, all the rest, he had imagined fully before experiencing them. Perhaps all his life would be like this, a foreseeing of experience, a con-

scious arrangement of his future. Was that, he asked himself, the happiest existence? He shrugged his shoulders. What could it matter? It was *his*. Nothing could change it.

His father grew softer, more wistful, day by day. He spoke gently to his son, almost meekly. He had acquired a habit of asking unexpected questions: What shall we do with that bush? It's all worm-eaten, or Do you think you would prefer living in a dormitory? or Are you going to take your mandolin with you? There were no more commands, no rough words. Haltingly, hesitantly, but persistently, the man was trying to express his real affection, so long submerged, for the strange boy who was his son. To Gareth this metamorphosis seemed ghastly, blasphemously ironic. But he knew what had caused it: the strain resulting from the three living together had been removed. How Gareth detested this simple man! It afforded him a cruel pleasure to realize that he would dupe him, take away from him the one unattainable thing he craved, destroy his last hope.

One day when Gareth was sitting on the porch, Lennie Colman passed the house. He had not seen her since the day she had called just preceding the funeral. As she came towards him up the walk she smiled, a tender, pathetic smile.

I hear that you are going to college, Gareth, she began.

Yes, he replied, rising to shake hands with her, I am.

Aren't you coming to say good-bye to me?

Of course I am, Gareth assured her. I'll come to see you whenever you suggest.

When are you going?

In two or three days.

Will tomorrow evening . . . ?

That will be fine. I am leaving some books for you, he added, as she was turning away.

O, Gareth, how kind of you!

I want you to have them.

He delivered the books that same afternoon, and the conversation the next evening on the little porch of the Colman home began with a reference to them.

It's wonderful of you to give me those books, Gareth, the school-teacher said. It makes me very happy . . . and a little sad. We've read so many of them together.

I thought of that. That's why I gave them to you.

But why are you giving them away at all? You'll want them yourself when you come back.

No, Miss Colman, I won't want them. I'm going to begin all over. I'll get a new library.

The conversation lagged. It was becoming more and more difficult for them to talk with each other. In her mind and in his, also, rose a memory of the Countess. Gareth began to wish that he had

not come, that he had left town without seeing Lennie again. He had known that he had no desire to see her. How stupid of him to have come!

After a long pause, Lennie managed to insert a reference to the subject which stood between them.

The Countess has gone, she remarked, rather self-consciously.

Yes.

I've seen practically nothing of you since you met her . . .

He was silent.

Did she tell you that I called on her last week?

No. His reply was truthful, his manner indifferent. No, she didn't tell me.

I didn't think, some devil prompted her to go on, although she knew she was making an error, that you were the kind of person who would desert your old friends for new ones.

I haven't done that, he muttered.

You mean a good deal to me, Gareth, she continued. I can't tell you how much. Now that she's gone I'm glad! She was taking you away from me. Lennie attempted to hide the seriousness of this accusation behind a smile, but her lips twitched nervously.

She waited for a reply. None came, and so she went on, Now that she has gone, and I was hoping that we might, we might . . . become friends again, now you are going away too.

This was more than awkward; it was stupid, horrible. He regarded her quite coldly, dispassionately: she was, he realized at this moment, a sentimental old maid with a scrawny neck. Determining to escape, he rose.

It's growing late, he said. Father wants to see me tonight. He told me he would sit up for me. We're going over some figures in relation to my allowance.

He offered her his hand. Lennie took it. Then, bending forward, she permitted her head to fall on his shoulder and burst into tears. I don't want you to go, she sobbed. I don't want you to go! He could feel her body trembling.

Miss Colman!

I love you, Gareth. I tell you I love you! You mean everything to me. If you only knew how hard and dry my life is! If you only knew how much you have given me! I can't get along without you any more. If you'll just stay here that will satisfy me. Just stay here. I don't ask for love. I don't expect you to love me, but let me see you sometimes. Let me see you!

Struggling to free himself, Gareth saw an uncertain figure lurch against the latched screen-door.

G'way, young man, the figure moaned in an unsteady, husky voice. G'way. Thish no place for you. I've disgraced my daughter an' her mother. I'm a drunkard. I spend all my daugh-

ter's money on booze. I don't work. I letter work for me. Thish no place for you. I've disgraced thish home, ruined my daughter's life.

Lennie turned. Father! she cried. O! my God! Father!

Gareth, released, fled down the street.

Chapter XVIII

One morning late in September, a warm, fall rain, accompanied by a heavy wind, drove the leaves, already withering after the hot, dry summer, capering up and down the streets, shaking and twisting the branches of the trees, forcing the birds to seek shelter in the eaves under the roof-cornices. In such refuge, English sparrows, in profusion, sat in long, quarrelling rows, like silly curates chattering at a picnic.

Presently the wind died down and the rain-drops fell more slowly until, at last, they stopped falling altogether. Now the clouds rolled rapidly away, unveiling the sun, while on all the lawns hopped robins and blue jays, eager to peck up the angle-worms which had been washed to the surface.

A little while after the sun appeared, Mrs. Bierbauer, like a figure in one of the old animated barometers, opened her screen-door and issued forth, bearing a broom, with which she began to sweep the leaves from her porch. This duty accomplished, after she had wiped the moisture from her rocking-chair with a towel, she sat down and began to rock slowly back and forth, croaking softly to herself:

I've a secret in my heart, sweet Marie;
A tale I would impart, love for thee.
Every daisy in the dell
Knows my secret, knows it well,
And yet I dare not tell
Sweet Marie!

Here, Trilby! she called. Puss, puss, kitty, kitty, kitty.

Trilby did not appear. He gave no evidence, indeed, that he had heard, although he was under the front porch.

The sun was high and its rays direct and burning. The pavement was drying rapidly; the sidewalks were already dry. More birds descended to take advantage of the unexpected free lunch. Occasionally a robin obstructed the path of a belligerent sparrow. Then there were passages at wings, bill-blows, followed by shrill cries of anguish and precipitate flight on the part of the robin, for the sparrow was invariably the victor in these duels. Flies in swarms began to buzz about the porch. Mrs. Bierbauer reached for her wire swatter.

The foreday hegira to business had begun. Buggies, sulkies, bicycles, phaetons, rolled by. Familiar figures occupied the seats. Mrs. Bierbauer, noting mentally that every one seemed in a hurry this morning, absent-mindedly continued her crazy croon in her muffled, creaking voice:

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true!
I'm half crazy, all for the love of you!
It won't be a stylish marriage;
We can't afford a carriage;
But you'll look sweet
Upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two.

Mrs. Bierbauer was in an expansive mood, of that there could be no doubt. Something had happened to please her. Hands on knees she continued to rock back and forth. Occasionally she chuckled. Then, like a cat, who has just disposed of half a pound of raw beef, she licked her chops with gusto. Presently she inserted her hand in the capacious pocket of her Mother Hubbard and drew forth a stick of spruce gum, which she began to chew rapturously. The rhythm of her chewing and the rhythm of her rocking, while strangely at variance, made a pleasing syncopation.

A moment later, her neighbour's screen-door was opened, and Mrs. Fox emerged, followed by Free Silver, wheezing and snorting. Damp weather always affected his asthma for the worse.

Good mornin', Mrs. Bierbauer.

Mornin', Mrs. Fox.

We've had quite a nice rain.

It'll be cooler now.

Fresher.

Yes.

After a short pause, Mrs. Bierbauer remarked, You're late this mornin', Mrs. Fox.

I was puttin' the bread to set. Mrs. Fox was apologetic. She, too, had seated herself, and was rocking valiantly.

Ahem, Mrs. Bierbauer disapproved. Funny day to bake.

The bread give out unexpected. We ate so much this week. Mr. Fox's been home almost every night. He's death on vittles.

There fell another silence during which Trilby crawled out from his bedroom under the porch, walked up the steps with his tail erect, and rubbed his slanting, arched back against Mrs. Bierbauer's leg.

Where've you been? You bad cat! Didn't you hear me callin' you?

I don't think it'll rain again, Mrs. Fox put forward timidly.

Not likely. Mrs. Bierbauer continued to rock and chew; her expression was beatific, like that of a washwoman who has just been notified of her canonization.

Mrs. Fox regarded her with suspicion. You got somethin' on your mind, I jes' know, Mrs. Bierbauer, she challenged her neighbour.

O, I don't know. What makes you think so?

I jes' know you got somethin' on your mind. You hadn't orter tease me.

P'raps.

O, now tell it!

I don't know as 'twould interest you. Mrs. Bierbauer's manner was at variance with the sense of her announcement.

Go 'way! Go 'way! Mrs. Fox was driving off a strange dog who appeared to be about to dig up the geraniums set in a thin, scraggly row around the base-boards of the house. I wish she'd keep her dog to hum, she commented, as she again settled herself in her rocker.

Now, Mrs. Bierbauer, she pleaded, turning back to her neighbour, I *know* you got somethin' on your mind, an' you gotta tell me.

Mrs. Bierbauer appeared to be on the point of yielding. It was apparent, indeed, that in holding back her information she was tantalizing herself quite as much as she was her friend.

Eddie, she announced ominously, got back from Chicago last night.

I know, Mrs. Fox assented eagerly, I know. Go on! Go on!

An' he went away agin this mornin'.

He allus does that. Mrs. Fox was disgusted.

Yes, he got back last night. He was to Chicago. Mrs. Bierbauer appeared to be in no haste to divulge her secret.

Well?

If you'll stop interruptin' me, Mrs. Fox, Mrs.

Bierbauer announced with some assumption of dignity, p'raps I can tell you my story.

I'm listenin', Mrs. Bierbauer. No offence intended.

Mrs. Bierbauer went back to the beginning. Eddie got back from Chicago last night. . . . Mrs. Fox, intimidated, continued to rock, restraining her impatience as best she might. . . . He was in the Illinois Central Depot an' who d'ye think he saw gettin' on the New York train?

Who?

Give you three guesses.

Mrs. Townsend?

No! Mrs. Bierbauer was disgusted. She's allus goin' to New York. What'd that mean?

Fred Baker an' some girl?

O! you're way off. Not that he wouldn't. It's *two,* he saw, *two,* she added significantly, furnishing a clue.

Not Dr. Sinclair and Mrs. Wiltbank?

Mrs. Bierbauer threw up her hands with a gesture of despair. They've gone to Texas; you know that!

Well, I thought mebbe they'd come back. Mrs. Fox pondered. I jes' can't guess, she admitted at last.

Mrs. Bierbauer was now ready to explode her bomb. Leaning towards her neighbour, she stared her straight in the eye, and shot it out: That Countess and that Johns dude.

No!

I tell you yes. There's worse. Both of 'em had bags and she was leanin' on his arm.

No! Do tell!

I'm tellin' you. Fred was real close to 'em—they don't know him from Adam—an' he heard her callin' him Baby an' Dearie!

Well, well! the old hussy. Mrs. Fox was thoroughly contented with life.

She's old enough to be his gramma, sixty if she's a day!

So he didn't go to college. He's a slick one.

What'd I tell you all summer? When two people, male an' female, goes trampin' round the country all day there's allus somethin' in it. Where there's fire there's flame I allus sez. I knew they was sparkin'.

What'll his father do?

Shut up, I guess. He orter be glad to be rid o' the dude.

What'll Lou Poore do?

Same as afore. She ain't seen her sister here for twenty years. I guess it'll be about twenty more afore she dares show her face agin in these parts.

What'll Lennie Colman do?

This last query, apparently, was what Mrs. Bierbauer had been waiting for. Before replying, she smacked her lips. Serves her right, she said, for foolin' with children placed under her in the High

School. She'd better be lookin' out for her father, allus boozin' round saloons.

Mrs. Fox, too astonished to say more, opened her mouth in wide amazement. Mrs. Bierbauer, highly satisfied with the results of her disclosure, continued to rock and chew.

Presently, however, she began again. Do you know what I say? she demanded.

What's that? asked Mrs. Fox.

Good riddance to bad rubbidge. There's an undesirable element in this town and it's gettin' out, thank goodness. Partly one way, partly another. There's the Klondike . . .

If there's war with Spain, embroidered Mrs. Fox, exhilarated by the idea, that'd take a lot of 'em off.

Enough's goin' as it is. Mrs. Bierbauer frowned on those who improvised on her own themes. Mrs. Fox, she went on, this town's gettin' cleaned up. Iowa's comin' into her own. Look at the bumper corn crop. See what McKinley's done for the tariff. Look at the new water-works. They're goin' to start the new depot next month. The plans is ready now. The cedar blocks is bein' torn up on Main Street. Bricks is to be laid. 'lectricity's comin' in. Brother Eldridge got fifty converts at Waterloo last night. The bad element's goin' out. Let 'em go to New York and spend their boodle on Bradley-Martin balls. Let 'em swill up their Seeley dinners! Let 'em take in the prize fights at Carson City! Let 'em jubilee their Queen! Iowa's a pure,

one hundred per cent American state, an' it's lookin' up!

The Parcæ rocked in silence for a time. Trilby, curled up in a ball at his mistress's feet, was purring. Free Silver continued to snore. Presently, Mrs. Bierbauer croaked softly to herself:

I've a secret in my heart, sweet Marie!

October 20, 1923
New York